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OUR REVIEW OF THE FIRST HALF OF 2002

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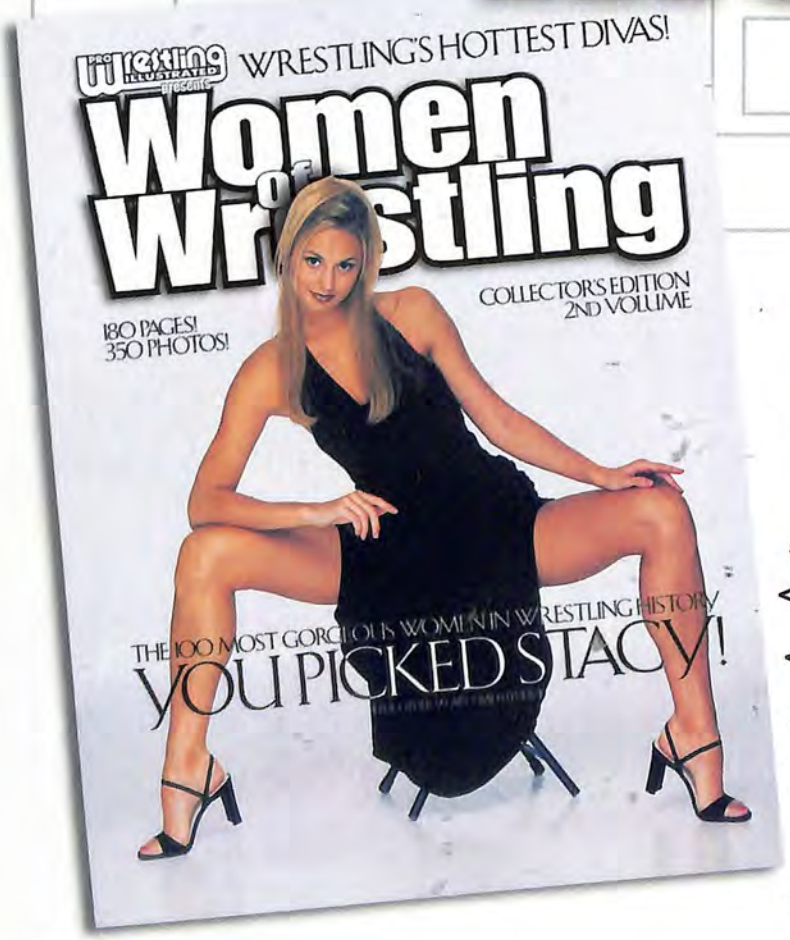

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from the desk of...

"At first, I felt like a cheater. But I looked around and everybody was doing it."
—Former Major Leaguer Ken Caminiti, discussing his steroid use in *Sports Illustrated*

THE COVER STORY of the June 3 edition of *Sports Illustrated* sent shockwaves throughout the sporting world. For the last few years, baseball fans have been skeptical of the tremendous increase in the number of home runs being hit. Most assumed the balls were juiced; few suspected that the players were as well.

When Caminiti came forward and told *SI* that more than half the players in the league were actively using steroids, everyone was astonished—everyone but wrestling fans, that is. We might not have seen needle marks on players' butts, but we know that people don't suddenly gain 40 pounds of muscle and increase their home runs stats from 25 to 40 per season. If, as was the common belief, it was all the ball, then why weren't all the players' power numbers up? We now know that those who used gained; those who did not looked even weaker by comparison.

Some of us just don't care if wrestlers and baseball players ruin their lives with the drug. They are, after all, their bodies to do with as they please. And who doesn't love a wrestler like Davey Boy Smith, with the body of an Adonis and the grace of a butterfly? Or a ballplayer like Jose Canseco, whose power/speed stats had never before been seen? If they want to ruin themselves, fine, they're making millions and I'm being entertained.

But what about those men competing who choose to do right by their bodies and right by the law of the land and don't use steroids? And what about those people whose very real dream is shattered by the accomplishments of players with artificially enhanced muscles?

It's enough to make Popeye choke on his spinach.

The cause of Davey Boy Smith's death had not been determined at press time, but it is widely known that Davey Boy abused steroids and steroids abused him. His life after he began using steroids was one disaster after another. His health, his marriage, his career—everything that one needs to nurture for the long haul—was obliterated. At the time of his death at age 39, he had less than he had when his career started at 15.

No, not every athlete will experience the negative impact of the drug immediately. Steroids didn't wash away Superstar Graham's life like a beach home during a hurricane. They eroded it, like the beach where the home is built. He made his money. He can't buy a new liver.

Caminiti says he sees nothing wrong with his decision to take steroids. Baseball commissioner Bud Selig has called for mandatory testing. The Players Union, whether they agree or not, will doubtlessly try to use the point as a bargaining chip during labor discussions. They'll talk about protecting the players' right to privacy. But who will talk about protecting the player who would choose to do the right thing if only he were allowed to play on a level playing field. That's just not the case. The 50 percent of the players who take steroids make the field unlevel because, well, they carry a lot more weight.

There are big leaguers in both baseball and wrestling who use steroids and hate the fact that they do so. They don't do it out of greed, but out of need, just to keep up. The NFL, the NBA, and even WWE have outlawed the use of these illegal, harmful, and (in the very real sense that they deprive people of opportunities should they chose not to use them or force others into a position in which they feel they have no choice but to use them) immoral drugs. If people are finding ways around the testing, the leagues have to find a way to catch those cheaters.

Because that's all they are. Cheaters. Caminiti's first impression was right.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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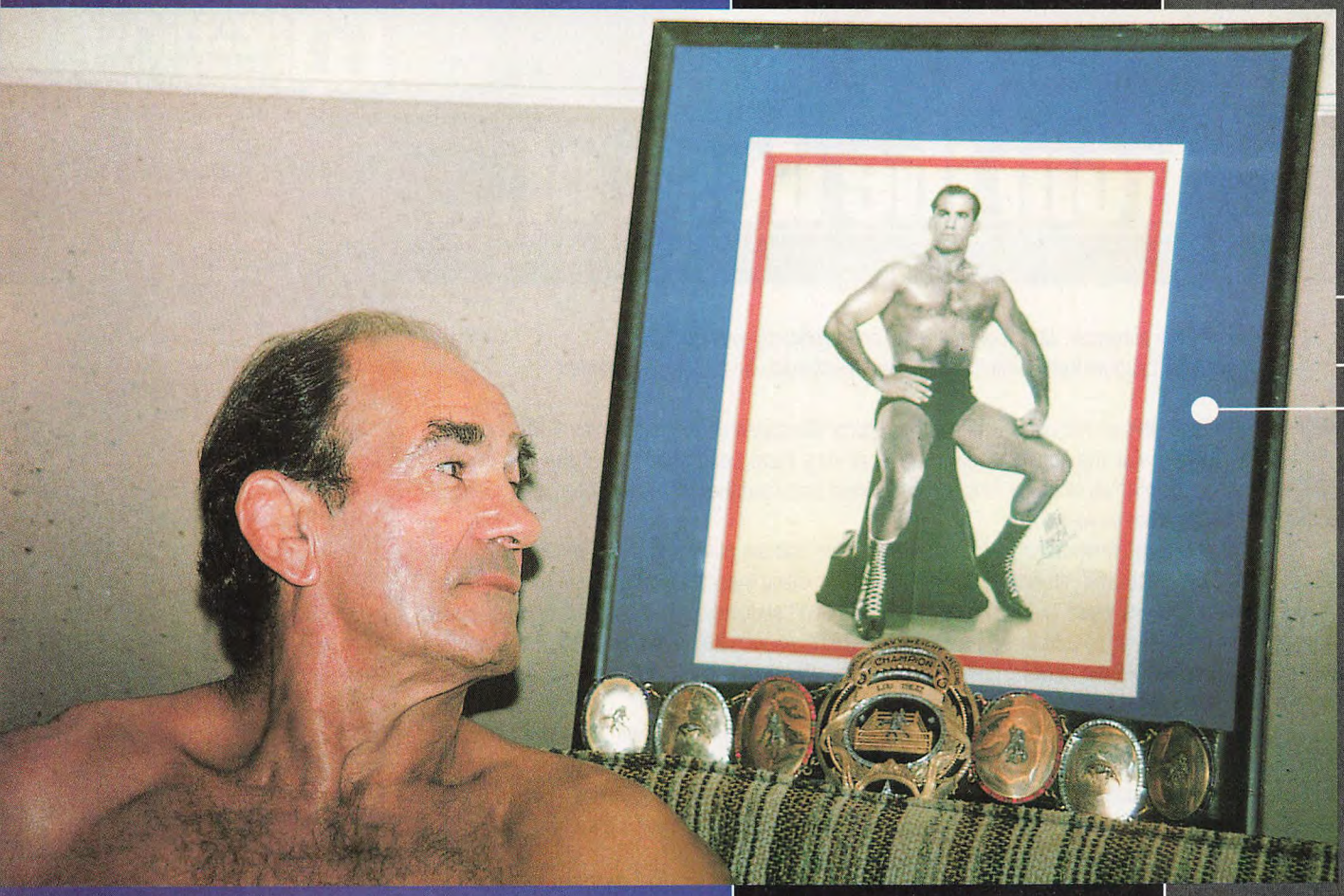

SMACK!
DOWN!

PWI®

October 2002

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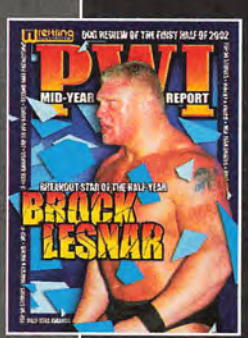

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Even icons have to take the occasional stinkface

before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

FOZZY'S WORLD

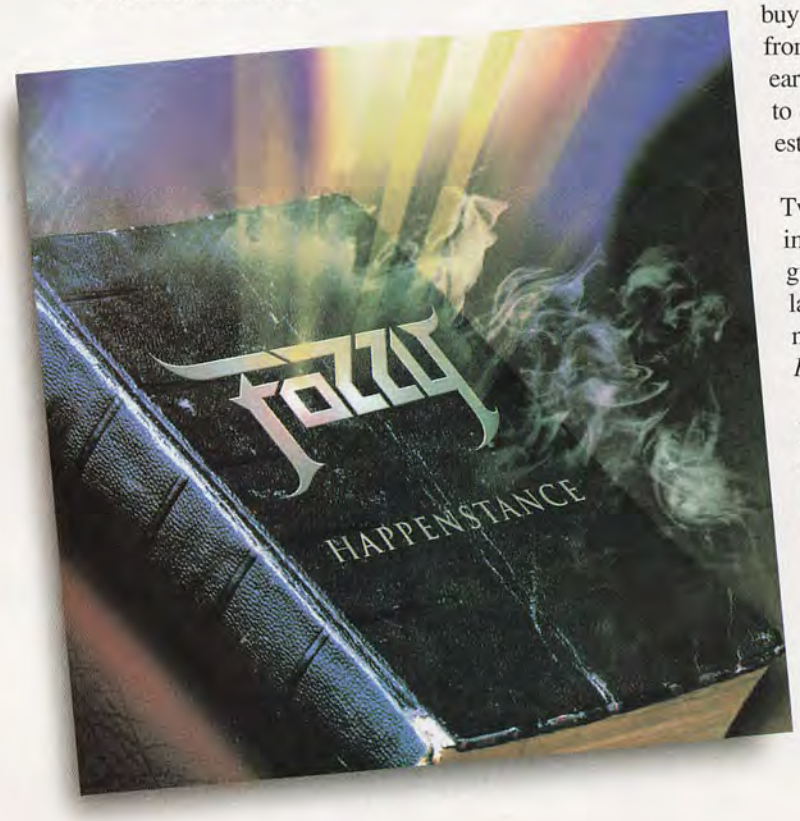
Heavy metal icon Ozzy Osbourne is music's reigning court jester. Earlier this year, *The Osbournes,* which featured Ozzy and his dysfunctional family cursing, screaming, and getting into one inane predicament after another, did something that no regular program had done in quite some time: It unseated *WWE Raw* as the most popular TV show on cable.

Now that we intimately know Ozzy and family, Fozzy enters the picture. The members of this still relatively unknown heavy metal band are ready to entertain the living heck out of you. On July 30, the band's newest CD, *Happenstance,* was scheduled to hit your local musical store. It's up to you to decide whether or not to buy it.

Chris Jericho hopes you will.

See, Fozzy's lead singer is a guy by the name of Moongoose McQueen. McQueen claims to have been in Japan for the better part of the last 20 years, bound there by a contract that he and the rest of Fozzy signed way back in 1981, when they created the musical genre known as heavy metal.

Yes, you read that right.



According to legend, Fozzy signed an iron-clad contract with Happy Mountain Rock Records and its mogul, Masami "Sammy" Tomami. Three weeks after signing the contract, however, Big Happy Mountain Rock Records went out of business, and Tomami went into seclusion, stranding Fozzy in a foreign country—and the members couldn't leave because their 20-year contract forbade it.

According to Fozzy's publicity, "[Heavy metal] exploded worldwide, and out of the brilliance of Fozzy's work came the new wave of British heavy metal, the German power metal movement, and the entire U.S. street metal, thrash metal, glam metal, and smoking jacket metal scenes."

Uh-huh. Sure it did.

Now, in case you're wondering why we're covering an unknown band with such a ridiculous history, it's because you know ol' Moongoose McQueen by another name: In reality, he's the aforementioned Jericho (although he'll never admit it).

As for *Happenstance,* Fozzy's latest offering, we are not going to tell you to run out to your local music store and buy it. But we also aren't going to tell you to run away from it screaming with your hands cupped over your ears if you see it on a retail rack, either. All we're going to do is tell you what it sounds like. If it sounds interesting, head to the store and look it up.

Whitesnake. The Scorpions. Iron Maiden. Ratt. Twisted Sister. AC/DC. All these bands seem to have influenced Fozzy's sound in one way or another: guitar-heavy, screeching, high-pitched vocals, ballads that strive to have an edge. These are the hallmarks of Fozzy's sound, and they're all found on *Happenstance.*

Did we like the CD? Yes. Everyone on our staff liked it for different reasons, reasons way too numerous to list here. And while we don't suggest that Jericho give up his day job (or is wrestling his night job?), we have to say that it's a fun album.

Fozzy is starting to make a name for itself, just 20 years later than expected. Let's go with three suplexes out of five for the Spinal Tap wannabes. Dream Theater, watch out.

THE STUPID FILES

Okay, all you creative minds out there, we heard and we listened. After last month's experiment with the dot-dot-dot format, our mailbox was filled with letters saying how much more you liked that version of "The Stupid Files."

Some of you liked the fact that there was so much more to laugh at. Others of you liked the fact that it made for a quicker read. Others just liked the dot-dot-dot format better for no apparent reason; all they knew was that they enjoyed the new format a little bit more in comparison to the old one.

That's why we're doing a complete switchover. From here on out, "The Stupid Files" becomes a dot-dot-dot item column. Quick, fun, and silly items. It also becomes something other than "The Stupid Files"—we're just not sure what to call it.

That's where you come in. You've all been doing so well with "Caption Me!" that we thought we'd give you a harder challenge: Rename "The Stupid Files"! If you think you have a good title, e-mail it to PWIFocus@aol.com or use the U.S. Post Office and mail your submission to "Stupid Files Renamed!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. A few months from now, this column will have a new name. Maybe it'll be the one that *you* came up with.

Now, on with the ridiculousness.

Raven hasn't had much of an in-ring career of late. The WWE creative team has had a hard time coming up with a gimmick and storyline for the guy, so more often than not, the former ECW champ was stuck wrestling on WWE's hard-to-find syndicated shows. Then he's offered a spot as the regular co-host of MTV's *Heat.* You'd think he would have jumped at the position. Oh no. Raven bolted from Jonathan Coachman's side faster than you say "mid-card" ... With all the rebranding of props, sets, and graphics following the WWF's name change to WWE, you would have thought that *Raw* announcer (and WWE Vice President) Jim Ross would have done better than to wear an old WWF logo shirt on the night the company announced the name change. You've would have thought that. Ross later poked fun at his own mistake by noting it would be the last time he dressed for the show in the dark ... Staying on the subject of the name change, with casual fan interest in wrestling no longer at its peak, was it really smart of WWE officials to go with the "Get the 'F' Out" marketing campaign?

What if some WWE viewers take that literally?

Only a few months ago, we here at "Before The Bell" commended Joanie Laurer on the path her career has taken since she left the WWF. Then she made an appearance on Fox's *Celebrity Boxing II,* where she faced Long Island reject Joey Buttafuoco and got pounded. It's going to be hard for her to portray a beat-any-man character when an overweight, middle-aged suburbanite handed her a whoopin', whether he fought dirty or not ... Believe it or not, the junk that Tommy Dreamer choked down while in the ring with undisputed WWE World heavyweight champion The Undertaker in late-May truly was 'Taker's spit and tobacco. Apparently Dreamer has a reputation going back to his ECW days for grossing people out ... Rumors persisted for months that the XWF had a chance at landing a cable contract with the Fox Kids Network. Strange thing about that rumor, though, is that there is no Fox Kids Network ...Vince McMahon is clearly enamored with Stacy Keibler. Every time the cameras catch the two of them together, they're found in some kind of compromising position. We don't understand it, though. Didn't Vince learn anything after Linda nearly divorced him over his affair with Trish Stratus? And why haven't we seen a response from Linda? ... By the way, what's up with all the cameras in what should be private areas? Is it us, or are all WWE personnel closet exhibitionists?

WE HEARD THAT!

"The big thing is there were some death threats sent to me anonymously by e-mail from people who say they are pro wrestlers who don't want any film of backyard wrestling out there because they think it's disgusting. But in general, the reaction has been one of shock and one of understanding."

—Filmmaker Paul Hough, the man responsible for *The Backyard,* a documentary on backyard wrestling

"Wrestling fans are very intelligent. I've never kidded myself about that, because I am a fan."

—Jeff Jarrett, in an interview on 1wrestling.com

"My wife has been wanting me to [shave my head] for five years now, so she's going to like it. It's funny, because I thought I'd look hideous bald, but it's really not that bad. But then again, I didn't have a lot of hair to begin with."

—Kurt Angle, in an interview on WWE.com

(Continued on page 10)

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"Presently, I am doing aggressive rehab work on my neck, which is funny, because I continue to rehab constantly on my back, shoulders, and my knee. Oh goody … another body part to work on."

—"Diamond" Dallas Page, in his online commentary on ddpbang.com

"That's another sign of a good ref, someone who can cover his own ass or is at least willing to take the bullet, so to speak, and look the idiot for the sake of a match."

—Lance Storm, in his online commentary on stormwrestling.com

"Well, the day we all got [to Japan], all of Zero-One went bowling. Now this may look like a simple and not-so-dangerous sport, but let me tell ya' like a true friend, it's a lil' brutal. On my next to last bowl, my hamstring pops, and the next two days I walked around like I had a wooden leg."

—C.W. Anderson, in his online commentary on ecwanderson.com

"You had guys, figuratively, stubbing their toe and taking five, six, eight weeks off or longer, and collecting on a guaranteed contract, and here you had me, who has a long history of working through a broken palate, blown elbows, torn biceps, concussions, you name it, and I'm not patting myself on the back, but that was just the way that I was taught. No matter what, you make it to the ring and you give some sort of performance in the ring."

—Shane Douglas, in an interview about WCW on 1wrestling.com

"Our goal for this match was to try to change the expectations of what a 'Hell In A Cell' is. They're famous for somebody taking a huge, crazy bump. We wanted to try to change that so that we can have 'Hell In A Cell' matches in the future, and people would know that they're brutal, barbaric matches, but someone's not necessarily going to fall from the top of the cage. That was a Mick Foley thing. That lived with Mick Foley, and I'd like to see it disappear now that Mick's not around, with all due respect. He was the king and no one can match the sheer courage of doing that. I just wanted to make it more of a brutal type of match, and that's what it was. I definitely think I succeeded."

—Chris Jericho, discussing his Judgment Day "Hell In A Cell" match with Triple-H, in an interview on WWE.com

caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors here at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This 1999 picture of Jerry Lawler sharing a secret with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Michael Cole needs a short, concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to PWIFocus@aol.com or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Four months from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better.

JULY'S BEST

"You're a mean one, Mr. Faarooq …"

—Brian Kirby, briank@intelos.net

"This is what I get for losing at poker … damn!"

—Kelan100@aol.com

"Hey, Vince, I know I need a new gimmick since The APA split up, but didn't we do this Xanta Klaus thing already? Damn!"

—leahandchris@rogers.com

"Deck Scott Hall and Hardcore Holly, fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la … damn!"

—Robert Payes, Parsippany, NJ

"Don't worry, guys, Hogan isn't going to hold us down. He just got me the lead role in *Santa With Muscles II.*"

—bigrams@hotmail.com

"S-S-S-S-S-Santa?! Th-Th-Th-Th-Th-That wasn't me drinking b-b-b-b-b-beer with B-B-B-B-B-Bradshaw!"

—Darren Oliver, New Orleans, LA

"But I thought if I was good all year I'd get what I wanted! What do you mean you don't deliver alcohol and tobacco products?"

—gcvpelt@bedford.net

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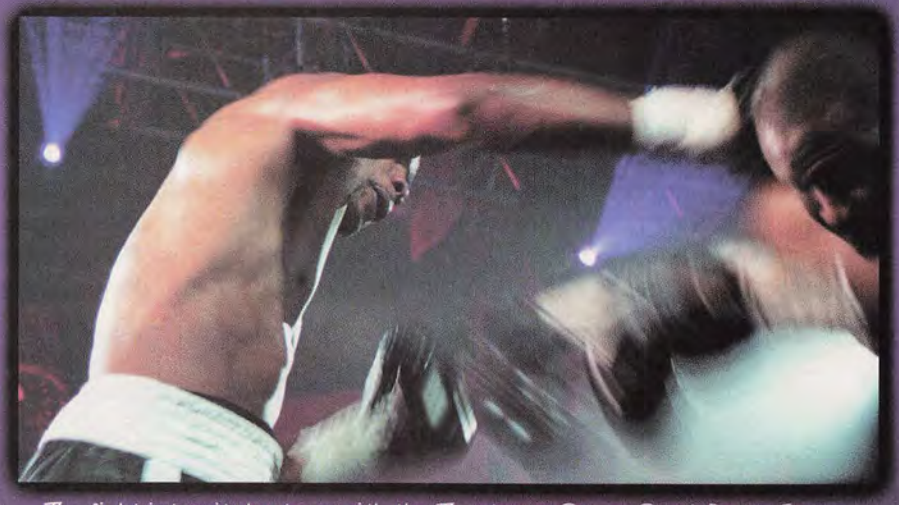

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ringside

With Will Welsh

AT TIMES, WRITING this column makes me feel like I'm readying my skills for a job as an obituary writer at a local newspaper. I don't like it. Not one bit.

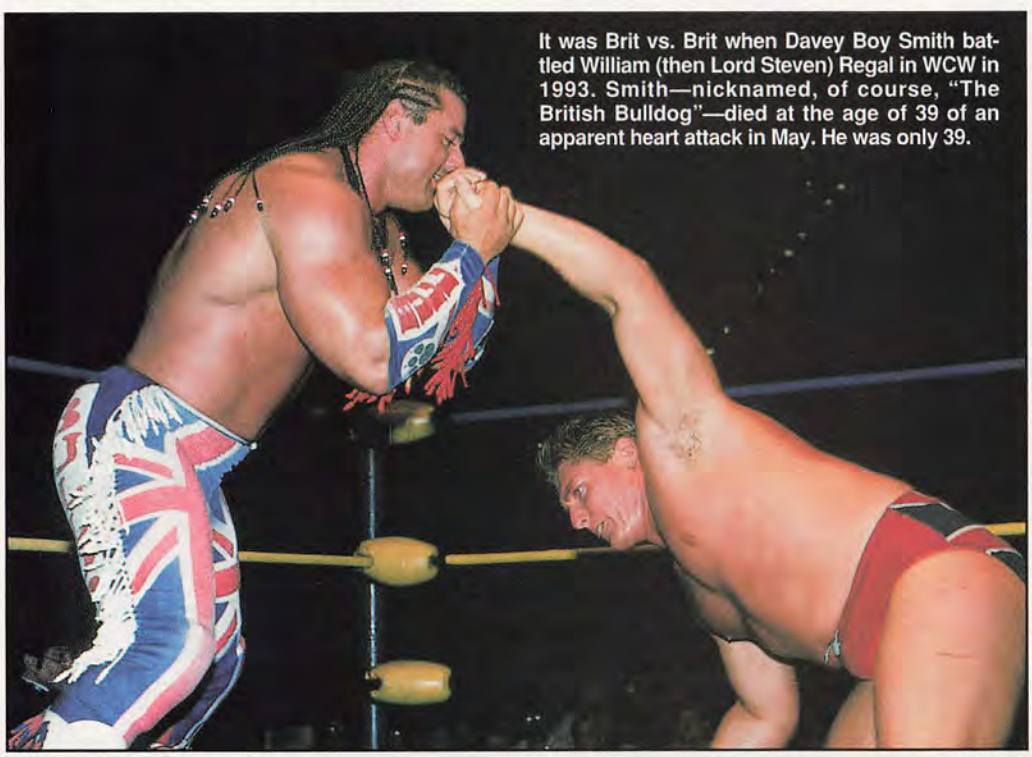
"British Bulldog" Davey Boy Smith, who is best remembered for his run as one-half of the classic **British Bulldogs** tag team with **Dynamite Kid**, died on May 17 while vacationing in British Columbia. He was only 39 years old. Preliminary reports from the coroner (pending results of toxicology tests) indicated he died from a heart attack caused by prolonged heavy steroid use, but United Kingdom officials were investigating Smith's death at the request of his father, who suspects some sort of foul play.

Smith began wrestling while still in his teens, and when Dynamite Kid moved to Canada to pursue his wrestling career, Smith followed. Shortly thereafter, he met the Hart family and became an unofficial member of the clan. (He eventually married into the family when he wed **Diana Hart**, the daughter of **Stu** and **Helen** and sister to **Bret** and **Owen**.)

When the Bulldogs joined the WWF, it didn't take long for the duo to become the promotion's most popular tag team. With their pet bulldog, **Matilda**, in their corner, Dynamite Kid wowed North American audiences with his crisp, high-flying, technical style (**Chris Benoit's** nickname should be Dynamite Kid, Version 2.0), while Smith provided most of the team's muscle. Their only WWF World tag team championship came in 1986, when they defeated **Brutus Beefcake** and **Greg Valentine** at WrestleMania II. Smith's biggest singles accomplishment came six years later at SummerSlam '92. In what would be voted Match of the Year by *PWI* readers, Smith defeated Bret Hart for the Intercontinental title in front of 80,355 fans in his native England at London's Wembley Stadium.

In the late-1990s, Smith jumped to WCW, but he never really caught on in Atlanta. In the summer of 1998, Smith suffered a serious back injury after being slammed on a metal trap door that **The Warrior** would use later in the night to make his entrance from underneath the ring. Smith was eventually diagnosed with two smashed disks and a staph infection that nearly killed him.

After recovering, Smith returned to the WWF for one last run, but he wasn't the same. In recent years, Smith wrestled a few times on the independent circuit with his son, **Harry**, grooming him for a career in the industry. He had hopes that a few years down the line, he and Harry would form a tag team in WWE.



It was Brit vs. Brit when Davey Boy Smith battled William (then Lord Steven) Regal in WCW in 1993. Smith—nicknamed, of course, "The British Bulldog"—died at the age of 39 of an apparent heart attack in May. He was only 39.

Unfortunately, Smith's wasn't May's only tragic wrestling death. **Alex Rizzo**, who portrayed **"Big" Dick Dudley** in ECW and XPW, died on May 16. As of press time, a cause of death had not been announced. Rizzo was only 34 years old. Long-time WCW referee **Randy Anderson** died at age 42 on May 5 after battling cancer for many years. Finally, **Abe Ford**, who promoted in Boston for many years, died on May 13 at age 90.

The wrestling world was hit by an almost unfathomable number of deaths this spring. One that didn't get nearly the attention that those of Lou Thesz, Wahoo McDaniel, and Davey Boy Smith got was that of Alex Rizzo, best known as "Big" Dick Dudley in ECW. Clockwise from top left in this photo are Buh Buh Ray Dudley. "Big" Dick, D-Von, Sign Guy Dudley (Lou E. Dangerously), and Joel Gertner.

The NWA-TNA promotion continues to add stellar names to its roster. Joining **Ken Shamrock** and **Jeff Jarrett** in the promotion are **Scott Hall**, former ECW World champion **Jerry Lynn**, **Konnan**, "Queen Of Extreme" **Francine**, **Norman Smiley**, **Devon Storm**, **Elektra**, and **Bobcat**, as well as a host of other talented stars. While the promotion's business plan may seem risky, don't rule out the group's chances for success yet. Unlike many startups that we've seen come and go over the past year, NWA-TNA actually has a bunch of intelligent wrestling people behind it.

Free agent alert: Former WCW World champion **Bill Goldberg** has negotiated a full buyout of his AOL Time Warner contract and is now available to the highest bidder. Reports say that Goldberg collected nearly every penny due to him, despite the fact that he was still under contract for more than a year.

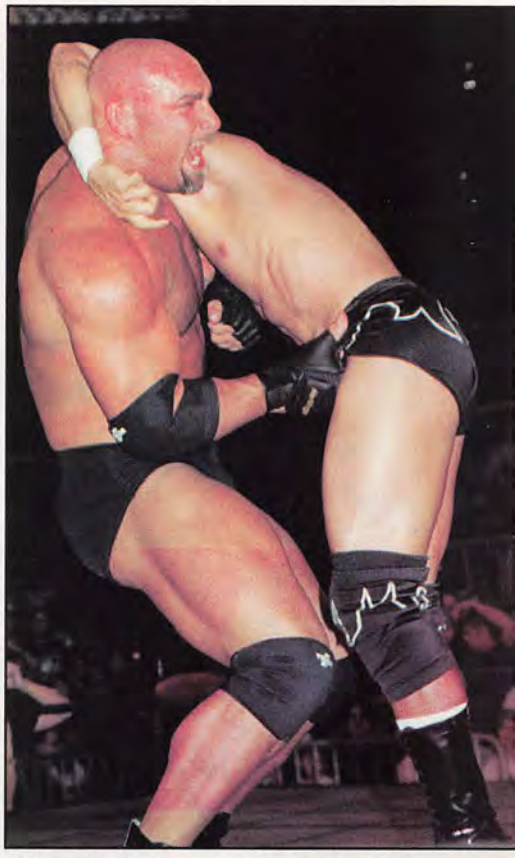
Although "Da Man" is a free man now, it's anything but a sure thing that Goldberg and WWE will come to terms. A lot of his attention has been focused on he Orient, where New Japan and Pride are both reportedly interested in acquiring his services. And for his part, Goldberg claims to be interested in giving the sport of shootfighting a try.

A piece of advice to Mr. Goldberg: Stick to what you know. I have a feeling those guys in Pride would tear you apart. You might not completely agree with WWE's politics or content, but it's where you'll make the most money, and it's the only place where you're guaranteed to retain your superstar status.

Vince McMahon has split his creative crew into two teams. **Brian Gewertz** is in charge of putting together *Raw,* while former ECW mastermind **Paul Heyman** is in charge of *Smackdown.* While Vince and **Stephanie McMahon** will oversee the writing of both programs, this has to be considered a good move, as two separate writing teams will allow *Raw* and *Smackdown* to develop styles of their own.

"Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig has been released by WWE because of conduct issues on a recent U.K. tour. Now that he's free, maybe he'll work those XWF shows that he was paid for before jumping ship ... Keep an eye out for a *Tough Enough* contingent to form in WWE. The idea is being bandied about ... Former WWE women's champion **Jazz** suf-

(Continued on page 82)



Bill Goldberg is no longer bound by his AOL Time Warner contract and is thus free to negotiate a deal with any promotion in the world. Japan looks like a pretty likely next destination.

in focus

By Dave Lenker

FLAIR FOR THE HOME TEAM

It sounded like the epitome of a wrestler getting what is commonly called "cheap heat" by those in the industry. What's the easiest way for a superstar to ensure that he gets booed by a crowd that might not otherwise react so passionately? Insult the people of the city in which you're working that night. Easiest way to do *that* is to rip one of the local sports teams, especially if said local sports team is in the midst of a hot playoff run or, on the flip side, doing very, very poorly.

Ric Flair got big-time cheap heat in Toronto in May when he reminded a *Raw* crowd that he was a 16-time world champion, which was "about 15 more than the (National Hockey League's) Maple Leafs."

That's far from true, though it must seem like it to long-suffering Leafs fans who haven't seen the home-town boys chug-a-lug from Lord Stanley's Cup since 1967.

But there was a little more to this cheap heat story. Maybe Flair, a hockey fan, was looking forward to a matchup between the Maple Leafs and his Carolina Hurricanes, a playoff series that would start just a few days later, and wanted to get some digs in on Toronto. That's right, Flair's Hurricanes. He may not own a piece of the Raleigh-based team, but he is connected to it. If you followed any part of Carolina's amazing playoff run this year and paid attention to background noise after every goal scored by the 'Canes at home, those were, indeed, Ric Flair *"Whooooooos!"* you heard.

Tony Gilliam, announcer for the Entertainment & Sports Arena (the Hurricanes' home facility), got to know the "Nature Boy" when they worked together in WCW years ago and recently told Raleigh's *News & Observer* that it wasn't easy to convince Hurricanes management that Flair was a big enough celebrity to get him involved with the team in such a high-profile manner.

"We went to a parade, and Mickey Mouse, in the middle of everything, [got] off the float and walked over to Ric and stuck a pen and paper out," Gilliam remarked to the newspaper. "Mickey Mouse in Disney World wanted Ric Flair's autograph. That's when I realized he was a legitimate star."

Once management was finally convinced, a camera crew was dispatched to Flair's home.

So when a Carolina player put the puck in the back of an opposing team's net in Raleigh this spring, thousands of fans saw Flair's face on the Jumbo-Tron and heard him scream, "That's a Carolina Hurricanes' goal. *Whoooooo!"* Apparently it was a pretty big hit with the people, so much so that some could be heard *"Whoooooo-ing!"* in parking lots after games and while watching the 'Canes on TV in bars.

If the Hurricanes' suits want to continue to go after the often-elusive young wrestling demographic (in spite of the Hurricanes' success in 2002, ice hock-

The NHL's Carolina Hurricanes got a little inspiration from Charlotte resident Ric Flair (above left) and his *"Whoooooo!"* during their terrific playoff run this year. Dave Lenker suggests they get future inspiration from—who else?—The Hurricane (above right).

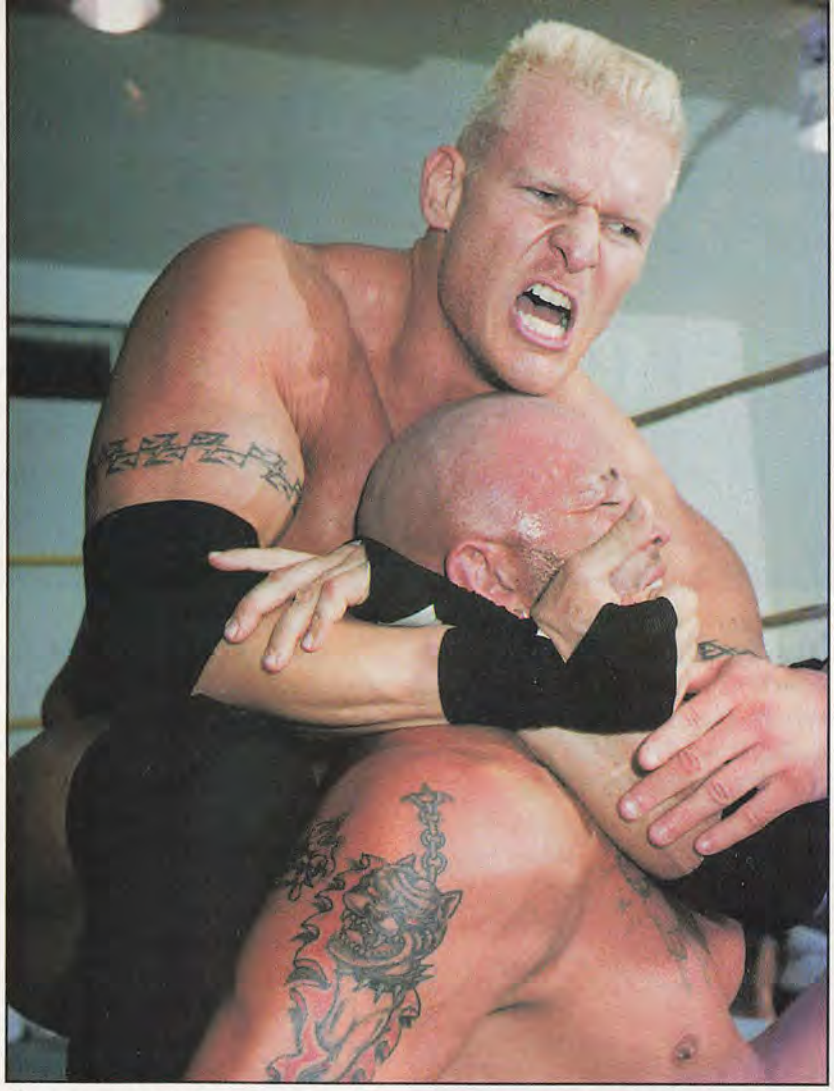
ey remains a pretty tough sell in the Carolinas), there's one more obvious tie-in the team could use. I'm not sure a certain 210-pound superhero type from Raleigh is a hockey fan, but what better cheerleader for the Hurricanes could you ask for than ... *The* Hurricane!

"Stand back, there's a Hurricane comin'!" could be used when the 'Canes take the ice before the start of games, and what better way to calm down thousands of fans irate over a bad call by a referee (there are plenty in the NHL) than to have The Hurricane's perplexed face appear on the JumboTron as he utters his favorite catchphrase, *"Whatsupwiddat?!"*

TWO ISSUES AND COUNTING ...

Roughly two months from now, you will have the 12th version of the *"PWI* 500" in your hands. The bright, full-color cover shot of the number-one man will be staring you in the face. I can honestly tell you that as I write this, I have no idea whose face that will be.

Every year as spring starts to turn to summer and the temperature and humidity levels begin to rise, I get to thinking about candidates for number one. While Brandi Mankiewicz concerns herself more with numbers, oh, 150 to 500, I obsess over number one.



What can we tell you about who might be the number-one guy in this year's "*PWI* 500"? Not a lot. Well, we can tell you that Big Bad John and Redd Dogg, although they have been quite entertaining in OVW, have been eliminated from consideration ... we think.

I bring it up in conversations with our writers, our correspondents, our photographers, fans, even the guy who asks me if I want salt, pepper, or oregano on my Subway sandwich.

This is the most important decision we make every year at this magazine. I need input from everybody, *dammit!*

So far this year, I've heard a lot of *"Hmmmmmm,* good question ..." and "Nobody really stands out" type of answers.

"Well, Jericho did have the undisputed title for four months, but he's gotten killed in pretty much every match with Triple-H and hasn't done a whole lot since WrestleMania," one person told me.

"Steve Austin still wins just about every match, but he hasn't held a title since December and has been in a lot of ho-hum grudge matches since then," offered another.

"Triple-H has pretty much been the man in WWE since he came back in January, but he didn't wrestle a single match from August (start of the 'grading' period for the '500' each year) through December," pointed out yet another.

Thanks for your help in pointing out reasons you think certain guys *shouldn't* be number one, folks. But I'm still thinking long and hard about who should. And I'm not convinced any of those three men should be eliminated from serious consideration just yet.

I think we can eliminate non-WWE wrestlers this year (making plenty of progress here), as well as anyone who has lost to either Crash Holly or Planet Stasiak since August. The field is getting more and more narrow by the minute! But that's about as far as I can go for now. I could make reasonably good cases for several darkhorse candidates as well as established veterans. This could easily be the hottest debate over number one since 1997, the year Dean Malenko took the top spot. That's why I'm so looking forward to the "500" meeting this summer. This one could last a while. We'll figure it all out eventually.

Look for this year's "500" in the same place that you found last year's, in the December issue of *PWI.* It goes on sale at newsstands on October 1.

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at PWIFocus@aol.com.)* □

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

MY "FIND/CHANGE" option for my word processing program just received a taxing workout. This WWE crap is really annoying. I'm sure you all won't get it, either, and will continue to scribble "WWF" in the context of your letters. I agree with Vince and company when they say, "Get the 'F' out!" but only if you'll listen. Luckily, I have enough trouble trying to decipher "WWF" when you write it, so the letter change isn't really that difficult for me. I'm used to having to change what you write.

Hey, this is confusing, but most of you aren't even aware that this is the second name change for the company. The next time you want to complain about your poor little fingers having to remember to type an "E" instead of an "F," just think what Vinnie Mac version 1.0 went through when they dropped a "W" from "WWWF." I'm sure it took a few years to adjust to that change as well. For what it's worth, nothing has really changed. It's the same game plan, same Chuck and Billy, and same boobs-o-plenty on the chick end, minus Stacy Keibler, of course.

This column is WWE sanitized for your protection because I am your champion and the queen of WWE.

Dear Brandi,

I am a big fan of WWE and I watch almost every single WWE event. I am writing because every time I read your article, I get sick to my stomach. You are very rude to a lot of WWE fans and we don't appreciate it. WWE cannot go on without its fans. If you keep on disrespecting WWE fans, a lot of us are gonna stop being fans of WWE, and WWE ratings are gonna drop even more than they already are. I love to watch the top WWE superstars as well as the hottest women in WWE take action into the squared circle, and I'd hate to have to stop just because every time I watch it I think of you and all your rude comments.

GUNNAR DAVIS
g11145161012@yahoo.com

Dear Gunnar,

I find it amazing that you would stop watching the WWE just because I criticize it. Man, I bet if Soupy Sales had my ability to influence your little mind, he'd still be sending you postcards from Puerto Rico. If you don't know who Soupy Sales is, you are missing a great piece of American pop history. I'm not rude; I'm just right.

Dear Brandi,

I am a fan of WWE, but it seems like that is all I hear about. The magazine is good and it would be better if you showed more independent promotions from around the country. How much WWE is too much? Ric Flair talking 20 minutes is how much.

WILLIE SIMPKINS
xodus247@yahoo.com

Dear Willie,

We would love to feature more independent promotions from around the world. Just in case you aren't sure which we should focus upon, please pick up the 2002 *Wrestle America* "Guide To Professional Wrestling," available on newsstands everywhere on September 24, 2002. In it you'll find tons of information about the greatest—and not-so-great—promotions in the world. Save your pennies, Buttercup, and buy that one when it hits the newsstands. It'll be almost as good as Christmas for you.

Who is this smiling freak? Why it's California-based wrestler Mike Modest. If you said, "Huh?" I suggest buying the *Wrestle America* "Guide To Professional Wrestling" when it hits newsstands in September. If you are too lazy to go to the newsstand, stay tuned here for the "*PWI* 500." Modest will be ranked high among his Pro Wrestling NOAH compatriots.

Brandi,

I got a few e-mails about your comments from the letter I sent to your column (July 2002). I got one positive and one negative. So I decided to check out the issue myself. And I was actually, to be honest with you, quite annoyed about the response you gave me. Obviously you don't need any qualifications to have your own column in *PWI*. You completely didn't even get my point! My point was that of all the contestants that tried out for *Tough Enough*, they picked the only ones that had the look or character that they needed for the show. Not real athletes. I mean they get up there, rant and rave about how much they want the contract and how they will do anything to be in the WWE, and then at the first sign of "Oh my goodness, this might be tough," they quit like a bunch of babies. There were 500-plus other people who would take their place in a heartbeat and could probably do a heck of a better job. And as for good ol' Jim Ross, he may have done a few things for wrestling but come on ... he's no Vince McMahon. He is and always will be "The King's" jolly sidekick with a silly black hat. And as for your personal comments toward me, no, I do not fit into those categories, thank you. As for you, you're probably not aware of this, but when they don't publish your picture in your column, it's because you're too ugly or you don't exactly fit into the little space provided. So as for intelligence, I give you a two stars out of a possible five, and as for looks ... if they're anything like your attitude, they've gotta be *ugly!* Of course, that's just my opinion ... but in this case, I'm absolutely right!

JUSTIN SANE
team_vandam@yahoo.com

Justin,

I hate to tell you this, but two does not equal a few. In fact, it's supposed to be more than two. I received several e-mails (six to be exact) as well. They all read pretty much like this one:

Dear Brandi,

I have been sitting back and reading your column every month. Mainly your column is one of the reasons I buy PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED. I am just taking the time to write to you and thank you for finally putting all of those wannabe wrestling freaks and all of those so-called "fans," and I do use that term loosely, in their place. Each month, I read letters from all of those "fans" commenting on their trips to events and notice them badmouthing men like Jim Ross. This brings up a letter from a kid in the July 2002 issue of *PWI*. He made a comment on Jim Ross' size and the fact that he probably hasn't stepped into the gym for a while. This makes me upset because these "fans" say they know everything, but lack the respect for the business and all of those men that work their butts off day after day, being away from family probably more than 200 days a year. How dare he comment on the size of a great man like Jim Ross. So, Brandi, I thank you once again for finally shutting those little ingrates up.

From a loyal reader,
TOM R.
FullYL0aded1@aol.com

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

Brandi,

Guess what? I have a suprise for you. My bestfiend, the one you dissed in your July edition of the mag, Rose, she got into a wrestling school out of California. Her teacher says she is a natural. Looks like she will not only be getting close to a wrestling ring, she is actually in one now, professionally! And those mailing addresses, well, she got them through her school. Who knew schools would give those out. In fact, she got a reply from Kevin Nash. Anyways, I have better people to write to, not some snotty little hick like you.

Sincerely,
Cheyenna Hall
A_WWE_Employee25@yahoo.com

Dear Chyenna,

David Hannum once said, "There's a sucker born every minute" in reference to the fans of his great competitor, P.T. Barnum. I reprise that saying now, in honor of your friend's, *uh,* accomplishment. I hope she breaks a leg. You also gave me another surprise. I never knew WWE would hire a person who can't even proofread her own letter before sending it. Geez, I guess Ahmed Johnson does still have a chance with the company. □

"WWE employee" Cheyenna Hall has given us all hope that one day, we just might get to hand over a scrap of paper to Ahmed Johnson and get his valuable autograph. Until that day comes, we'll just have to keep dropping change into his tin cup as we pass him on the street corner.

krew-cuts

By Frank Krewda

Tough Enough 2. Al Snow and "Big" John Gaburick are far more accomplished talent evaluators than I am. But that doesn't mean I can't formulate my own opinion on how *Tough Enough 2* turned out.

So here it is: The final selections were complete unadulterated horse crap.

Now for some backpedaling. Linda and Jackie, this year's winners, are two tough ladies. Both possess knockout looks and have athleticism to burn. Of course,. Jackie had a bum knee, and it looked to me like Kenny, one of the other finalists, could wrestle circles around her, but not giving the nod to the hard-luck underdog would have spoiled the storybook ending.

Kevin Dunn, WWE's executive producer and one of the people who helped to make the final decisions, admitted as much on the show's final episode.

Once I saw Jackie limp her way into Trax for her final qualifying match against Ivory, which had all the flow of that infamous Booker T-Buff Bagwell classic from *Raw* last summer, I realized that *Tough Enough* was actually as competitive as the 1963 tournament the WWWF held in Rio de Janeiro to crown its first champion.

Now back to Al Snow and "Big." Please don't tell us Jake and Kenny were a "step behind" Jackie. You might be the experts inside the ring, but the view from my living room

Francine (above left) and Bobcat (above right) were among the first women signed by the Jarretts' new NWA-TNA promotion this spring. While Frank Krewda has nothing against those lovely and talented ladies, he fears NWA-TNA is going to look too much like a Vince Russo product.

showed that Kenny (and maybe Jake, too) deserved it more. (On a positive note: Jackie is a dead ringer for former NWA competitor Strawberry Fields. I wonder if she shares Strawberry's exhibitionist tendencies.)

The new WWF Urine Peein' champion. Speaking of excrement, what can I say about "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin going number-one on Arn Anderson? Plenty. For starters, I believe that if Vince really wanted to shock us all, he should have let Austin pee on Anderson for real. If that glow-in-the dark stream that landed on Arn's chest was supposed to be urine, Austin better A) stop drinking and B) go to a doctor. His bladder is obviously radioactive.

Whatever shock value that segment was supposed to have was washed away with the food coloring yellow number five Austin squirted on Anderson's shirt. If you really have to try to shock us, Vince, why not put Trish and Terri in WWE's first "squat-in-the-bushes" match, or Rikishi and Lance Storm in an "enema-on-a-pole" match.

Of course, that ill-advised and ridiculous skit was only a sign of things to come for "Double-A." After turning him into a toilet, Vince had "The Enforcer" punk out to Brock Lesnar, who helped McMahon regain 100 percent control of WWE, one week later. Looks like Tazz' reign as company eunuch is finally over.

Ol' Slapnuts. Just because Jeff Jarrett is an ordinary-looking, 52-time former USWA champion whose father and grandmother have had longstanding ties to Memphis wrestling, some people mistake him for some paragon of old-school tradition.

How quickly we forget that Jarrett didn't really arrive in the sport until he rode Debra's boobs to an Intercontinental title and started going upside folks' heads with his six-string. If you need any reminder that Jarrett's more entertainment than sports, his latest venture NWA: Total Nonstop Action should prove exactly that.

Jarrett's already on record as saying the organization will feature lots of wrestling with plenty of T & A.

The Warrior is back in the news. He posted a commentary on his Web site recently in which he ripped Hulk Hogan, Bret Hart, and Davey Boy Smith. It could be a prelude to an in-ring comeback for him.

But it's not until you look at the roster that you realize just how strongly Vince Russo has influenced "The Chosen One."

While NWA-TNA will showcase terrific athletes such as Ken Shamrock and Low-Ki, you'll also see The Johnsons (Richard and Rod), The Rainbow Express (Lenny and Lodi), and plenty of women (a lingerie battle royal was scheduled for the first show).

Something tells me Jeff has been listening to Russo, not his father, Jerry. That alone could turn this organization into an also-ran faster than you can say, "I got all the stroke around here."

Say what? In true superhero fashion, The Warrior recently revealed himself to fans on his Web site and used the occasion to rail against all that's wrong in sports entertainment. Perhaps inspired by the birth of a second "Warrior" (i.e. child), the sound of his own voice, or some far-fetched notion that he's still relevant to professional wrestling, Jim Hellwig also used the occasion to shop his services to only the most noble and reputable independent promoters who might be looking to hot shot their territories with a big name.

Underneath all the self-congratulation and Warrior-babble, only this much was clear: Warrior could do a lot more to harm than help any organization that can scrape up the fee he'll want to make a public appearance. His commentary made Bret Hart seem the picture of contentment. Ironically, the "Hitman" was one of Warrior's targets.

Apparently, Hart made the mistake of calling Hulk Hogan a hero in one recent *Calgary Sun* column. Bad move. Warrior instructed Hart, who's obviously too ignorant to know what a real hero is, to read up on America's founding fathers. He gave the same advice to Hogan, whose only crime was receiving a compliment. I'm sure Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Paine appreciate the endorsement.

But that was nothing compared to the tongue-lashing he gave Davey Boy Smith, who had the nerve to die at age 39. Rather than reflect on the life of a man to whom he had once been close, Hellwig chose to focus on Smith's oft-discussed flaws and demons. Finally, Warrior ran him down for falling prey to the excesses that characterized his life. Good to have ya back, Jim. □

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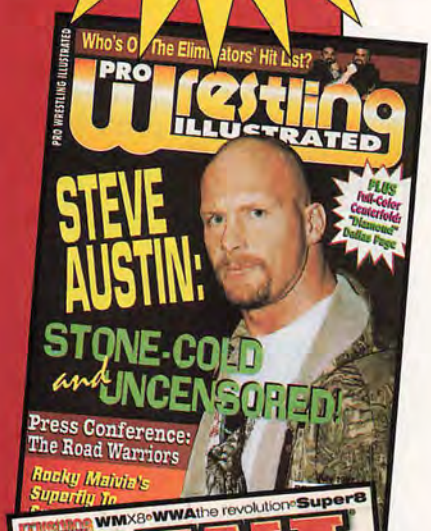

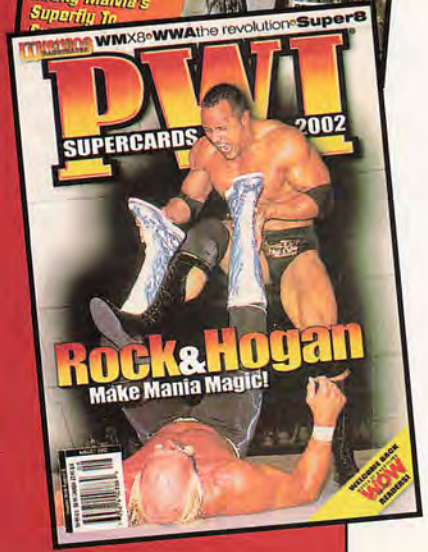

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January 1990: Warrior's Next Victim: Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Ross, Midnight Express.

May 1990: Hulk Hogan: Primed And Ready For WrestleMania VI. Centerfold: Great Muta. Plus: Piper-Rude, Eric Embry, Rock 'n' Rolls, Sid Vicious, pain.

July 1990: The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The "Total Package" Becomes The People's Choice. Centerfold: Rick Martel. Plus: Skyscrapers, Bobby Heenan, Mr. Saito, referees.

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

October 1990: Sting's Painful Lesson: You'll Have No Friends At The Top. Centerfold: Brutus Beefcake. Plus: Orndorff-Blanchard, Tugboat, Teddy Long, Ultimate Warrior, Road Warriors.

February 1991: WrestleMania VII Contest. Centerfold: 1991 calendar. Plus: Sid Vicious, DiBiase-Rhodes, Scott Steiner, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

April 1991: Sgt. Slaughter Guilty Of Treason! Centerfold: Tom Zenk. Plus: Sting, Magnum T.A., Jesse Ventura, Lawler-Gilbert, Hogan & Warrior.

June 1991: Hulk Hogan: America's Hero. Centerfold: Hacksaw Duggan. Plus: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Nasty Boys, Steiners, Simmons-Reed.

July 1991: The War Is Over! Hulk Hogan Liberates The WWF Belt From Sgt. Slaughter! Centerfold: Brian Pillman. Plus: Horsemen, Lex Luger, Eric Embry, Demolition.

August 1991 (Special Issue): Supercards '91. Centerfold: Hulk Hogan. Plus: WrestleMania VII, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior, Owen Hart, Koloff-Luger.

October 1991: Sid Justice: The Second Coming Of Hulk Hogan. Centerfold: Lex Luger. Plus: Hogan-Slaughter, Terrence Taylor, Barry Windham, Williams-Bigelow.

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February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

July 1992: The Best Of The Best—The Masters Of Their Craft. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Liger-Pillman, Jim Neidhart, U.S.-Japan, Ric Flair.

September 1992: Savage vs. Sting: Why It Isn't That Unlikely. Centerfold: Nikita Koloff. Plus: Steiners, Barry Windham, Sid Justice, Hodge & Weston, Shawn Michaels.

October 1992: The Hatred Still Runs Deep: Ultimate Warrior vs. Randy Savage—They'll Settle Up At SummerSlam! Centerfold: Cactus Jack. Plus: Steve Williams, Tom Zenk, WWF title controversy, fire match, Eric Embry.

November 1992: The British Bulldog: Hounding The Hitman. Centerfold: Ultimate Warrior. Plus: Honky Tonk Man, Steiners, Undertaker, Madusa, perfect wrestler.

February 1993: No One Can Cut Down Razor Ramon. Centerfold: Curt Hennig. Plus: Jake Roberts, Pillman-Dustin, Ric Flair-Road Warriors, Rick Rude, Snuka-Muraco.

May 1993: WrestleMania Without Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: The Undertaker. Plus: Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Madusa-Sherri, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior.

April 1996: WCW World Title Turmoil. Centerfold: The Kid. Plus: Hulk Hogan, Ahmed Johnson, Bob Armstrong, Michaels-Bret, Public Enemy.

May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

August 1996: Shawn Michaels: Finally—A World Champion. Centerfold: Sunny. Plus: 1-2-3 Kid, Sting-Flair, Sandman-Missy, Steve Austin, Jimmy Hart, WrestleMania XII.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

Winter 1996 (Special Issue): *PWI* 500. Centerfold: Shawn Michaels.

February 1997: Mr. Perfect: "Shawn Michaels Stole My Life." Centerfold: "Psycho" Sid. Plus: Kroffat & Furnas, Vince McMahon, Randy Savage, New Razor & New Diesel.

July 1997: Steve Austin: Stone-Cold And Uncensored! Centerfold: "Diamond" Dallas Page. Plus: Rocky Maivia, The Road Warriors, The Eliminators, Nick Patrick.

December 1997: Ken Shamrock's Deadly Climb To The Top. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Eddy Guerrero, Perry Saturn, WWF light heavyweights.

Holiday 1997: *PWI* 500. Centerfold: Dean Malenko.

February 1998: Sting vs. Hogan—The Match Of The Century! Centerfold: Hogan vs. Sting fight poster. Plus: 16-page Starrcade preview, Perry Saturn, Dude Love.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It ... But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

June 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 PWI Poll. Centerfold: Steve Austin. Plus: Sabu, Lex Luger, Sting, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg.

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December 1998: Gold Rush! Get Ready For The Most Awesome WCW Title Reign Ever! Centerfold: Undertaker. Plus: The Giant, Vader, Guerreros, Ken Shamrock.
Holiday 1998 (100-Page Special Issue): *PWI* 500. Eighth Annual Special.
January 1999: No Evil! Can Today's Fans Accept The Warrior's Creed? Centerfold: Chyna. Plus: Sting, Bill Goldberg, Summerslam.
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May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.
June 1999: (100-Page Special Issue): The 1999 *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.
July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.
August 1999: (100-Page Special Issue): Supercards '99: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Super 8, Bam Bam Bigelow, Jerry Lawler, tag team wrestling.
September 1999: Why Stone-Cold Might Get Out While He's Still On Top! Centerfold: Sting. Plus: Kidman & Misterio, The Rock, Bret Hart, Taz-Sabu.
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November 1999: The Women Of The WWF: There's More To Their Power Than Their Looks. Centerfold: Owen Hart. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr., Roddy Piper, Steiners, Steve Austin.
December 1999: Steve Austin: "CEO This! I'm The Damn Champ!" Centerfold: Rey Misterio Jr. Plus: Randy Savage, Jimmy Hart, WCW youth, Billy Gunn.
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June 2000: Just Wondering, Steph ... Is Triple-H Worth Your Billion-Dollar Inheritance? Centerfold: The Rock. Plus: Heyman-Van Dam, Vader, NWO.
July 2000: Call It A Wrap, Jack! You've Done Your Share ... Go Home! Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Dusty Rhodes, Disco Inferno, DDP, Dudleys-Hardys.
August 2000 (100-Page Special Issue): Supercards 2000: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Rob Van Dam, greatest supercards, Super 8.
September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.
October 2000: Scott Steiner: The Superstars The WWF Let Slip Away. Centerfold: Rikishi. Plus: Shawn Michaels, Austin-Rock, Rhino-RVD.
November 2000: The Rock vs. Triple-H. Our Special 50-Category Analysis. Pinups: Extreme wrestling. Plus: Nash-Steiner-Hall, Hardcore Holly, wrestling too extreme?
December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.
[FULL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH HOLIDAY 2000]
Holiday 2000 (116-Page Special): PWI 500. Includes: The editors' views, a look back at 1991's top 25, Achievement 2000 ballot.
January 2001: Who Does He Really Hate? Someone Will Pay For Austin's Pain! Plus: Steven Richards, Justin Credible, Gordon Solie, Jeff Jarrett, Arn-Sid.
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January 2002: There's Something About Lita—What Makes Her The WWF's "It" Girl. Plus: Jericho-Stephanie, Mark Henry, X-Pac, Triple-H, Undertaker.
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"THESZ HAS ON OCCASION BEEN CALLED 'THE BABE RUTH OF WRESTLING,' BUT EVEN THAT NICKNAME PROBABLY DOESN'T DO HIM JUSTICE. COMBINE THE PIONEERING EXPLOITS OF BABE RUTH WITH THE SMOOTH PROFESSIONALISM OF JOE DIMAGGIO, HOWEVER, AND ONE COULD MAKE A CASE. BUT THESZ WAS ACTIVE IN WRESTLING FAR LONGER THAN THOSE MEN WERE IN BASEBALL."

THE END OF AN ERA: WRESTLING BIDS FAREWELL TO LOU THESZ

BY HARRY BURKETT

LOU THESZ MET practically every major wrestling star, from the retired Martin "Farmer" Burns, who held the American title in the 1890s, to Bret "Hitman" Hart, who held the WWF World title as recently as 1997. Herbert Hoover was President when Thesz wrestled his first match; George H.W. Bush was President when he wrestled his last. He tangled with nearly every top grappler of the 20th century, from Ed "Strangler" Lewis and Verne Gagne to Bob Backlund and Masa Chono.

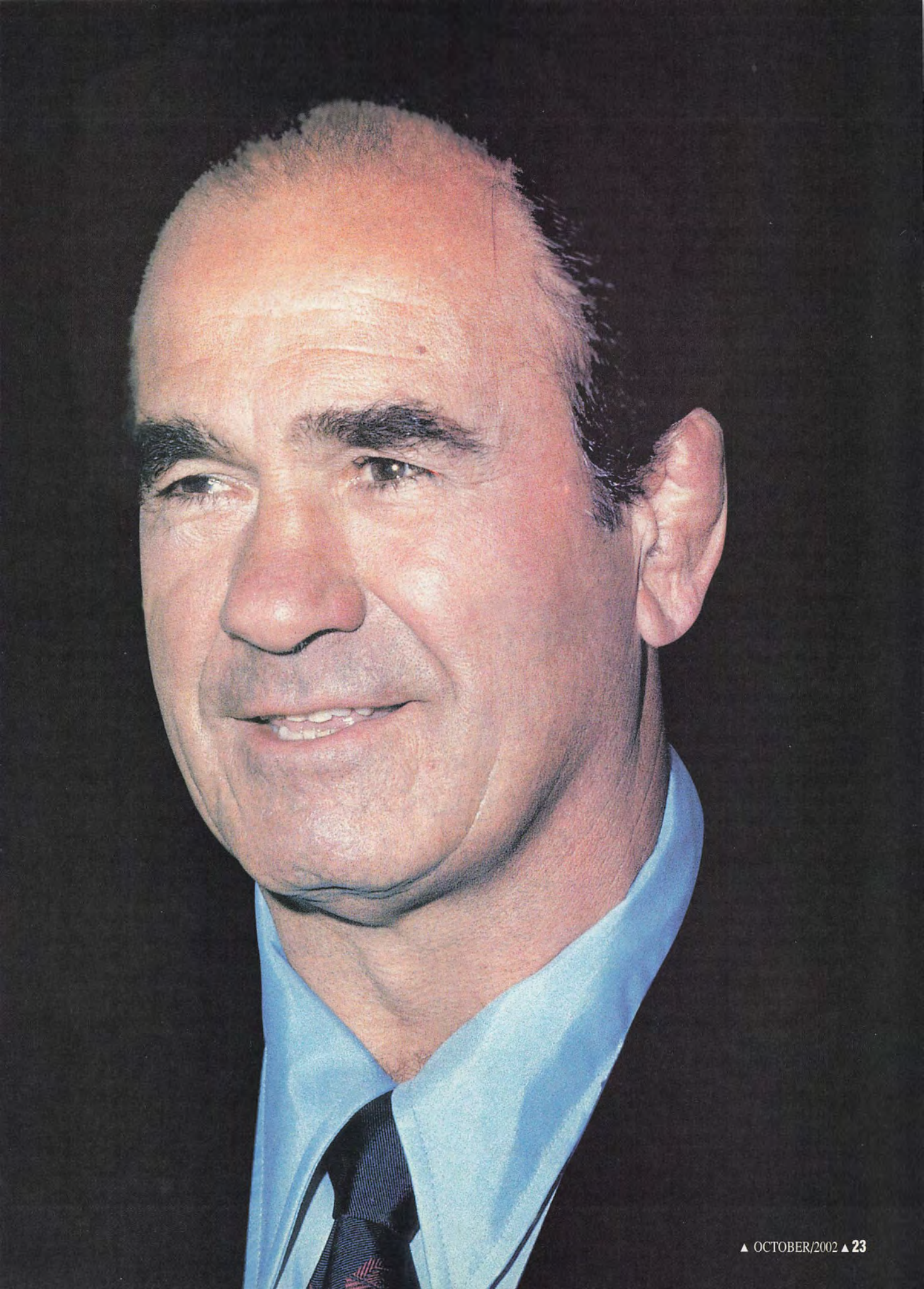
Oh, and he also happened to reign as world heavyweight champion for a total of 18 years in between.

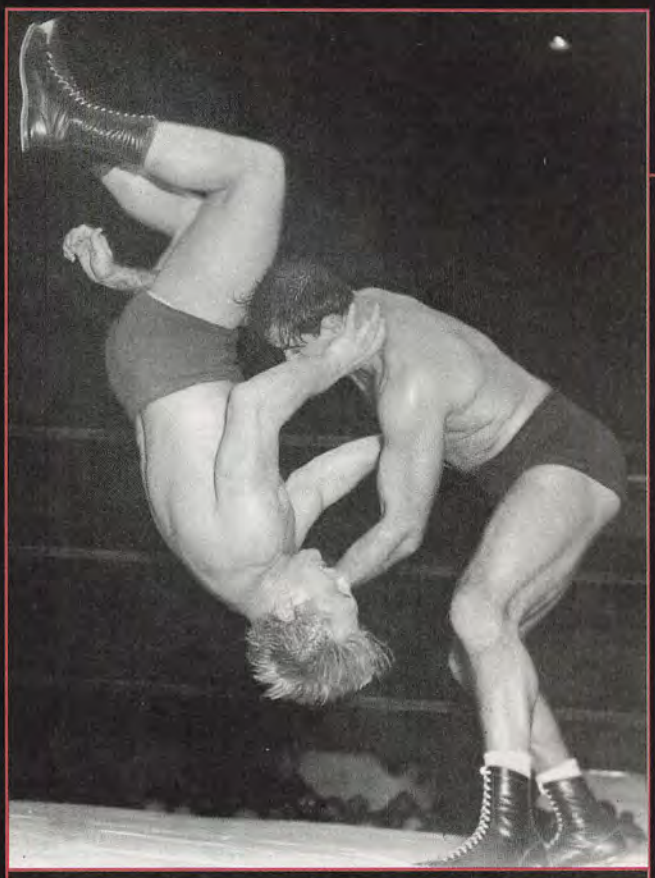
Thesz has on occasion been called "the Babe Ruth of wrestling," but even that nickname probably doesn't do him justice. Combine the pioneering exploits of Babe Ruth with the smooth professionalism of Joe DiMaggio, however, and one could make a case. But Thesz was active in wrestling far longer than those men were in baseball.

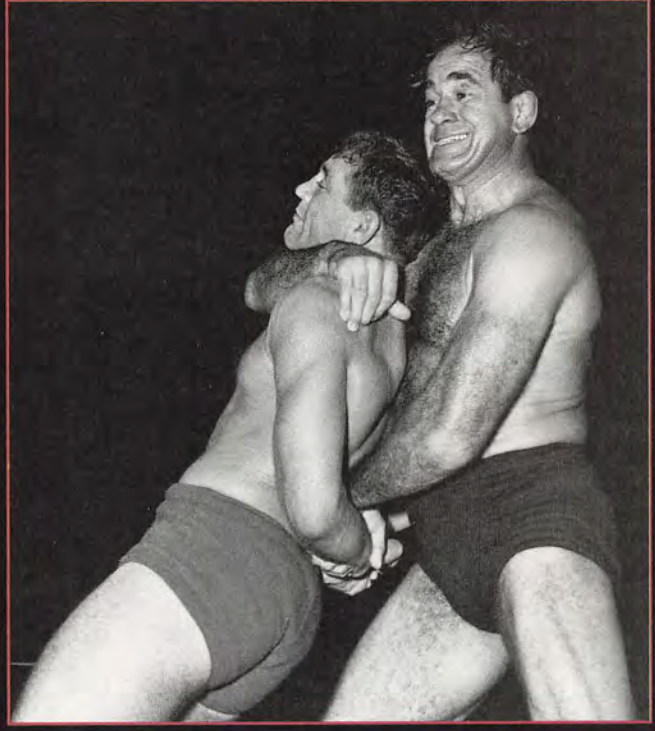
It's easy to understand why ring announcers often introduced him as the "incomparable" Lou Thesz. There is simply no other athlete that compares—in wrestling or outside of it.

That is why Thesz' death on April 28, 2002, is an immeasurable loss for professional wrestling. Not only does it mark the passing of the industry's most celebrated figure, but also Thesz' extraordinary living memory—our last link to Farmer Burns, Strangler Lewis, and Joe Stecher is now gone.

Thesz was born on April 24, 1916, in St. Louis, Missouri. His mother was German. His father, a shoemaker from Hungary, was an amateur grappler in his native country. He taught his son the fundamentals and took him to his first wrestling card, held at the St. Louis Coliseum in 1924. Young Thesz' hero was Ed "Strangler" Lewis, who held the world title five times between 1920 and 1932. It's no coincidence that when Thesz decided to turn pro in the early-1930s, he sought Lewis for training.







A match between Lou Thesz and Buddy Rogers in Toronto in 1963 (left) changed the course of the professional wrestling industry forever. It led to the formation of a company we know today as WWE. Whereas Thesz wasn't all that fond of Rogers as an opponent, he loved facing Danny Hodge, an accomplished amateur and pro (bottom left).

Thesz' physical conditioning, good looks, and dedication made him a hot prospect at the very beginning. He wrestled his first match at the age of 16 in 1932 and became the fastest-rising star in the St. Louis area. Under the tutelage of Lewis, Ad Santel, and Ray Steele, he discovered the world championship to be his destiny.

He became the youngest champion of all-time on December 29, 1937, by defeating Everett Marshall for the world heavyweight title of the National Wrestling Association, a division of the National Boxing Association at age 21. He lost the belt three months later to Steve "Crusher" Casey in Boston. Thesz beat Marshall for the title a second time on February 23, 1939, and held the strap for four months before losing to football star Bronko Nagurski in Houston.

The acclaimed "Wonder Boy" went through an eight-year drought before trading the world title with "Whipper" Billy Watson and "Wild" Bill Longson in the late-1940s. His defeat of Longson on July 20, 1948, however, marked the beginning of the longest world title reign in history.

At that point, Thesz sought unification matches with all other world title claimants. He was awarded the National Wrestling Alliance championship in 1949 when then-champ Orville Brown forfeited their match due to injuries suffered in an auto accident. The following year, Thesz defeated Gorgeous George for the old AWA version of the world title in Chicago. On May 21, 1952, Thesz beat Baron Michele Leone in Los Angeles to unify the California version of the world title with his NWA World championship. The $103,297 gate was at the time the largest in history.

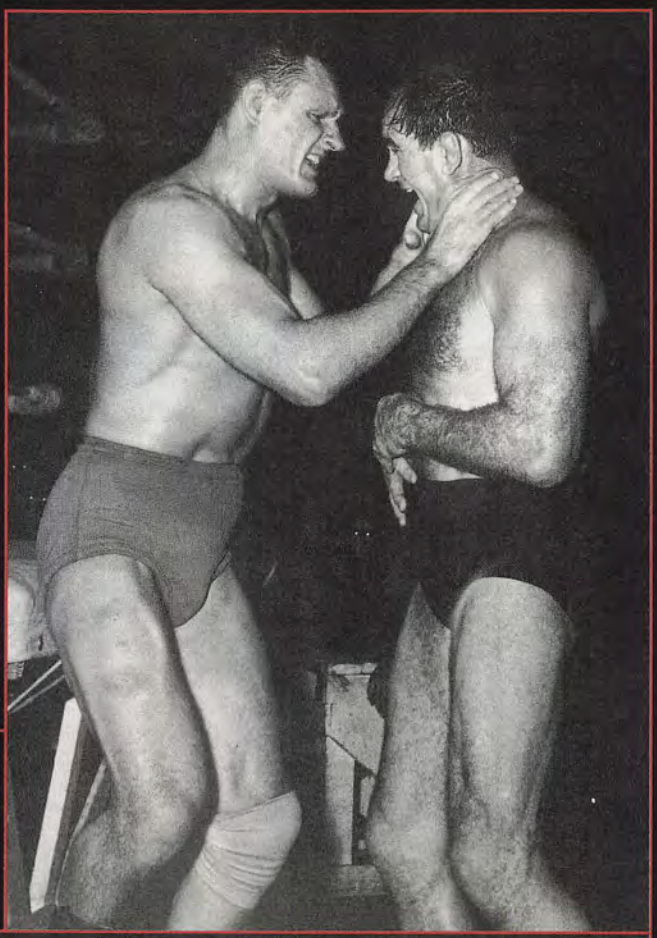
Thesz went on to reign as the undisputed world champion during wrestling's first golden age of television, all the way to 1956. On March 15 of that year, Billy Watson avenged his 1947 loss to Thesz by defeating him in Toronto. Thesz regained the belt in St. Louis eight months later.

During this period, Thesz made a decision that would give birth to Japanese wrestling. Contrary to the belief of NWA promoters, Thesz was convinced that Japan could be a wrestling hotbed. His title defense against Rikidozan on October 7, 1957, remains the most watched event on Japanese television to this day. They wrestled to a 60-minute draw. In

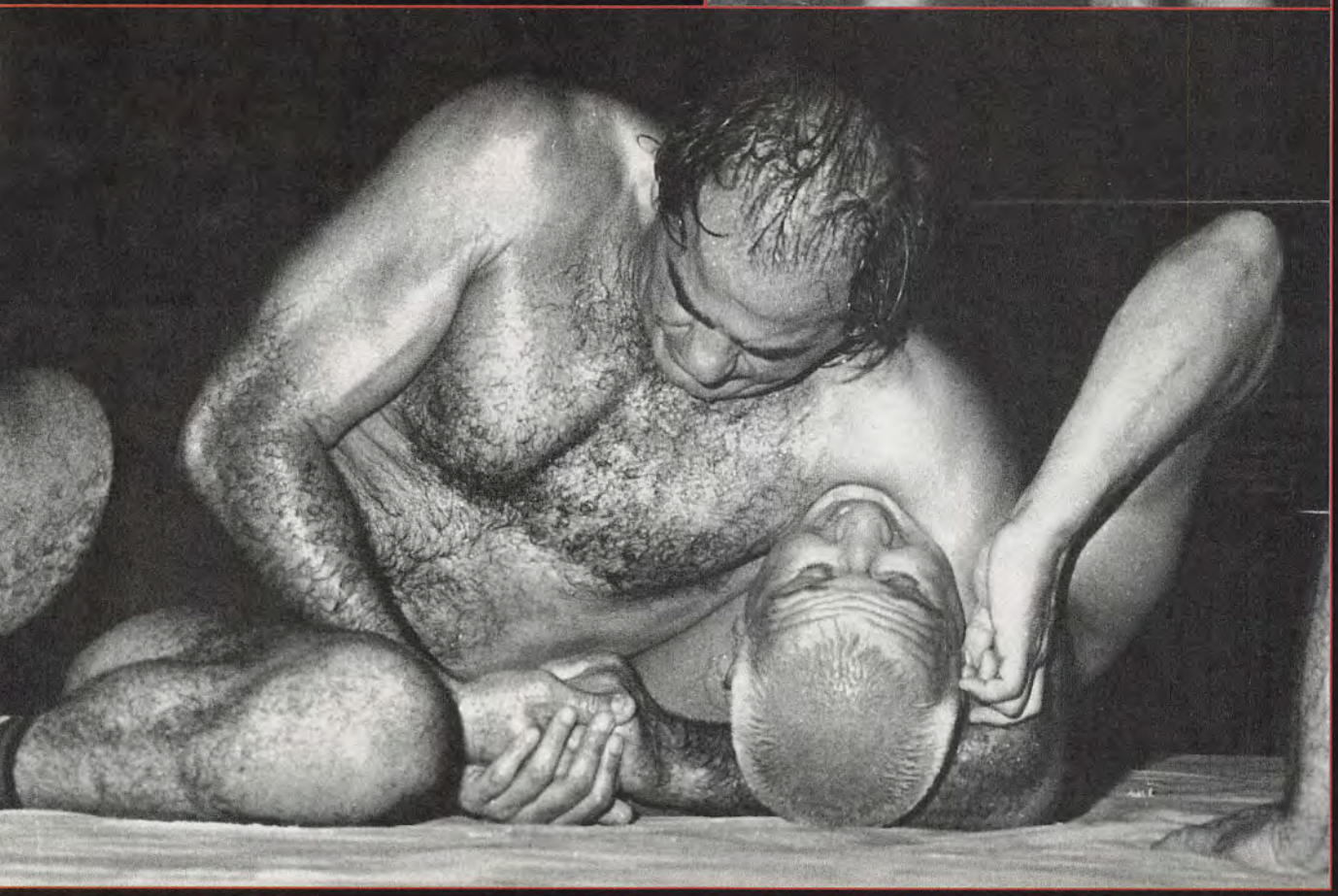
1958, Thesz lost the NWA International championship, which was established specifically for defenses in North America and Japan, to Rikidozan in Los Angeles. That title is now part of the All-Japan Triple Crown.

By the early-1960s, Northeastern promoters Vince McMahon Sr. and Toots Mondt managed NWA World champion Buddy Rogers, leading to the title being defended primarily in their territory. St. Louis promoter Sam Muchnick, who had managed Thesz and controlled the World belt in similar fashion, wanted the title defended on a broader scale.

The dispute led to Thesz challenging Rogers in a one-fall match held in Toronto. Thesz scored the pinfall and won his sixth world title. That wasn't the end of the controversy, however. McMahon and Mondt claimed NWA World title matches were supposed to be best-of-three-falls bouts, and that Thesz had not truly defeated Rogers. That gave McMahon and Mondt just enough credibility to establish the World Wide Wrestling Federation in 1963, with Rogers



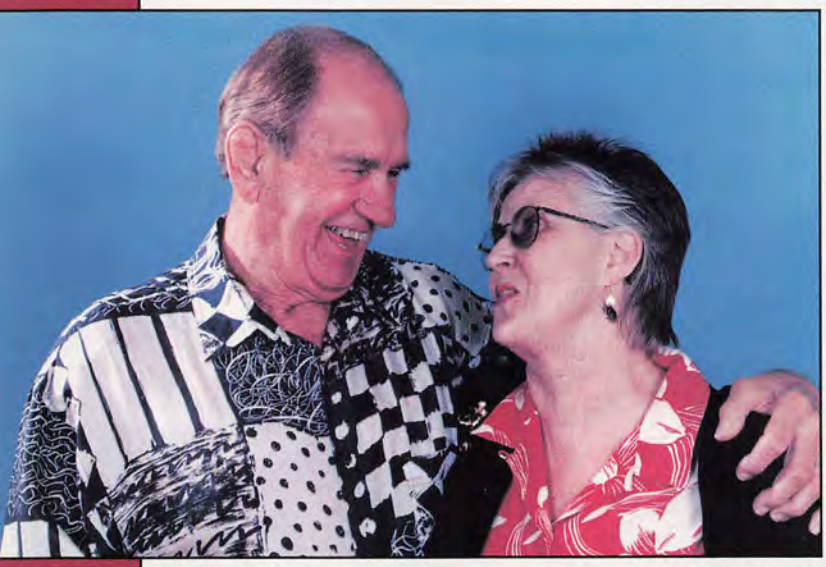
Thesz could thrive against the technical wizards as well as some of the more dirty players in the game in the 1960s, including WWF Hall of Famer Killer Kowalski (right).



Thesz overcame a 45-pound weight disadvantage to defeat Bob Orton Sr. (Randy Orton's grandfather, below) by disqualification in defense of his NWA World heavyweight title in 1964.

FROM THE ONE WHO KNEW HIM BEST ...

Lou Thesz met his third wife, Charlie, at a Nashville hotel while in town for a wrestling show. Charlie worked at the front desk and was intrigued when she discovered that the mild-mannered man was a pro wrestler. But it was Lou who made the first move and asked Charlie if she'd like to talk over a cup of coffee. Nearly 29 years later, Charlie has made it her mission to keep Lou's legacy alive. Here are some of Charlie's insights regarding her favorite subject, Lou Thesz.



Mr. and Mrs. Thesz

ON LOU'S HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: "Lou loved to sail, fish, and catch crabs, which he did often on the Chesapeake Bay when we lived in Virginia. He also kept a large garden with plenty of tomato plants and other vegetables. He was a wonderful cook. With his father being Hungarian and his mother being German, Lou made exceptional European dishes."

ON WHAT SHE MISSES MOST: "He had the largest hands. I didn't realize it until he was gone, but he always had his hand on me, sometimes on my back or just holding my hand. It just feels strange not to have Lou's heavy hand on me anymore."

ON LOU'S MODESTY: "Our neighbor once gave Lou a bright blue T-shirt that read 'Aged To Perfection.' For some reason, Lou never made a point to wear it, so I asked him why. He asked, 'Doesn't that make me sound a bit egotistical?' That was vintage Lou. He hated to brag. In fact, many of our neighbors didn't know Lou was a champion wrestler, because he never mentioned it to them."

ON LOU'S POLITICAL PERSUASION: "Lou met Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, both before they became President. He and Barry Goldwater were friends. He was conservative in his political views and had Fox News on the television all day. He even helped a local candidate in Virginia run for office."

ON LOU'S FAVORITE COMPANION: "Lou and our little dog, Schultz, were inseparable. Schultz went crazy looking for Lou while he was in the hospital, but now I think Schultz knows he's gone forever. He refuses to sleep on Lou's side of the bed, as if he knows it belongs to his master."

—Harry Burkett

becoming its first heavyweight champion.

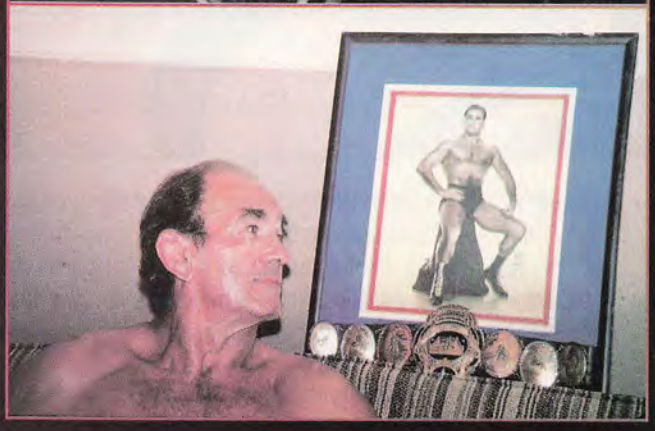
Thesz remained NWA World champion until January 7, 1966, when Gene Kiniski beat the 49-year-old veteran in St. Louis. The former "Wonder Boy" who set the record as the youngest champ ever was now the oldest champion of all-time. Thesz was ready for retirement.

His love of wrestling kept bringing him back, though, and he wrestled in special attraction matches throughout the 1970s and early-1980s, particularly in Tennessee, Japan, and Mexico. On August 27, 1978, El Canek's victory over Thesz for the Universal Wrestling Alliance title in Mexico City catapulted the masked man to superstardom in his home country.

Aside from his occasional matches, Thesz enjoyed serving as special referee as he got older. He officiated many matches in Southwest Championship Wrestling, World Class Wrestling, Stampede Wrestling, and Japan. Although he was a frequent critic of the WWF, he did make a few appearances with that company. He even

He didn't wrestle his final match until he was 74 years old, but Thesz retired from full-time competition long before that. Nevertheless, he stayed very active in the wrestling business in various capacities, including that of guest referee in several territories.

In addition to being probably the greatest wrestler of all-time, Thesz was always good to his fans (right). He was very proud of what he accomplished in his career and enjoyed looking back on all the good times he had. Check out the 1982 picture of him with his old NWA title belt and a photo of him from his early days in the sport (bottom right).



won an old-timers battle royal at New Jersey's Meadowlands in the mid-1980s.

He didn't slow down in the 1990s, either. Thesz became the first man to wrestle in seven different decades when, at age 74, he faced one of his pupils, Masa Chono, in Hamamatsu, Japan, on December 26, 1990. His artificial hip—implanted three years earlier—plagued him during that match, and he tapped out to Chono's STF, which Thesz himself had invented and taught his student.

In 1991, Thesz succeeded famed wrestler and actor Mike Mazurki as president of the Cauliflower Alley Club, an organization for retired grapplers. He helped bring the struggling group to new prominence. At Slamboree 1993, Thesz was among the first crop of legends to be inducted into the WCW Hall of Fame, along with Verne Gagne, Mr. Wrestling II, and Eddie Graham. He made another appearance for the WWF in October 1997, at the Badd Blood pay-per-view in St. Louis.

Thesz found a new passion in his later years: the International Wrestling Institute & Museum in Newton, Iowa. Wrestling historian Mike Chapman founded the Institute, which celebrates both amateur and pro wrestling. Thesz participated in fundraising efforts and contributed a significant amount of personal memorabilia.

To the amazement of his family and friends, Thesz kept himself at the peak of physical health well into his 80s. There was nothing better than a well-equipped training room to keep him happy, along with a sunny beach, or at least a tanning bed.

It wasn't until early-2002 that Thesz began acting lethargic and suffering from shortness of breath. Nevertheless, he insisted on an ambitious schedule, appearing at the Cauliflower Alley Club reunion in Las Vegas in February, being inducted into the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame in March, and also serving as best man at the wedding of former wrestler Shigeo Miyato in Japan.

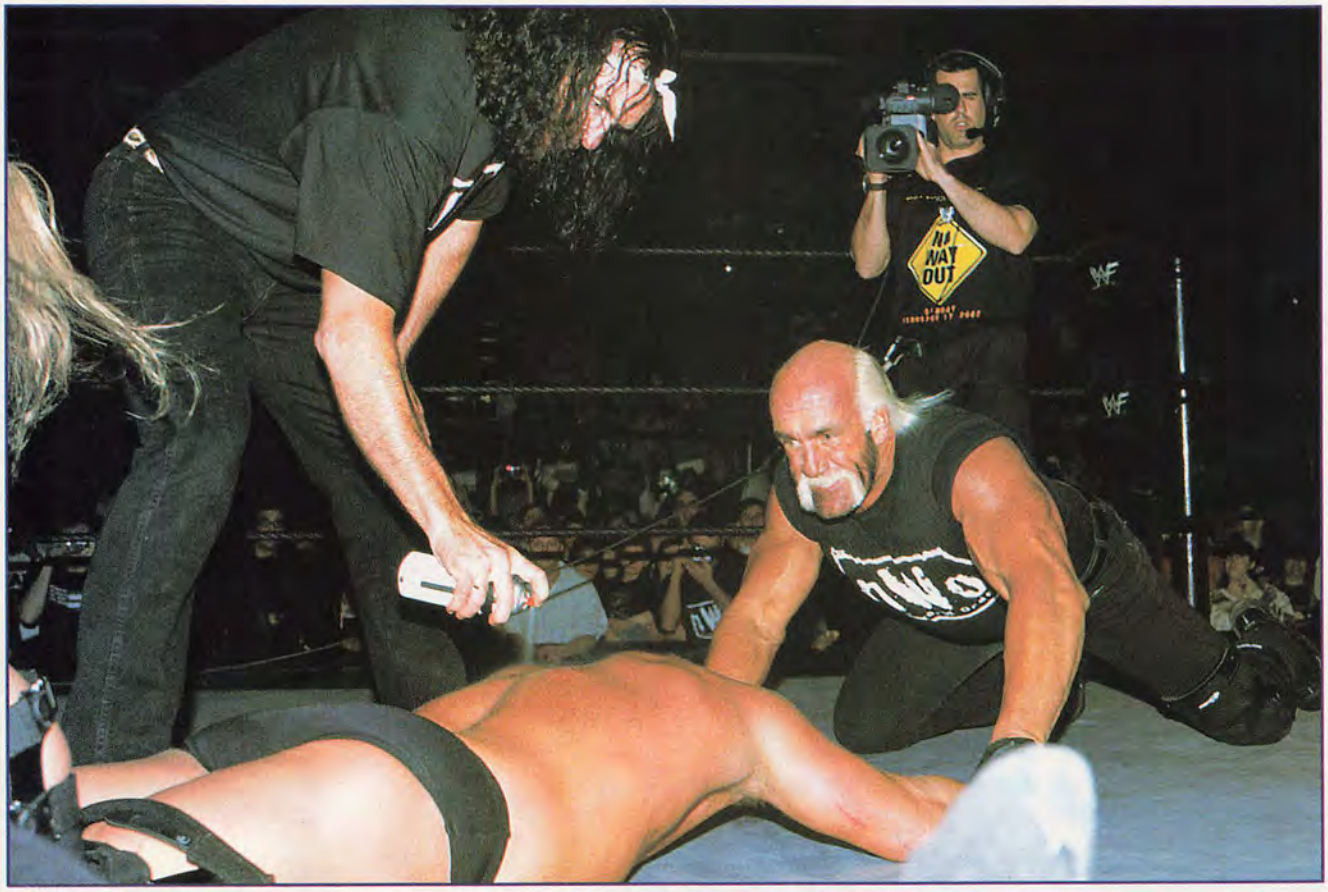
Thesz checked into the Orlando Regional Medical Center on April 4, where it was determined that he would need a triple-bypass and an aortic valve replacement. That was risky surgery for someone his age, but those close to him—familiar with Thesz' amazing recuperative powers—thought he would do well. Although the initial prognosis was optimistic, physicians remained concerned about Thesz' overall condition. Thesz tried to remain in good spirits as his health deteriorated, especially when he reached his 86th birthday on April 24. He died four days later.

Thesz is survived by his third wife, Charlie, along with three sons: Jeff, Bob, and Pat. He also leaves behind 10 grandchildren. And for those wondering whether his genes contributed to his longevity, he is also survived by three sisters in their 80s and 90s. Thesz' mother lived until the ripe old age of 97.

When asked about his greatest contribution to wrestling, Thesz once told *PWI* the following: "My greatest contribution is staying loyal to wrestling. I've stayed focused on wrestling, not rasslin' or show business."

That's probably how Thesz would like to be remembered. He was the most dedicated athlete in the greatest sport in the world. □

THE 2002 MID-



THE WORLD WRESTLING Federation, er, World Wrestling *Entertainment* dominated the headlines for the first six months of 2002. That shouldn't be a surprise considering WWE is the industry's only U.S.-based major league. The company also dominated the 2001 "Mid-Year Report" because of the WCW purchase and ECW's demise.

If last year's report highlighted the restructuring of the industry, this year's edition highlights the restructuring of WWE itself. The top two events this year were WWE's name change and the *Raw-Smackdown* brand extension draft. In our *"PWI* 50," which details the most important news stories of the half-year, we listed the name change as the number-one item, although the April 1 brand extension might have seemed to be a more significant event at the time.

So why did we rank the WWF-WWE name change number one? That's because the brand extension might evolve over the years, or WWE might merge the two brands back together someday (and perhaps sooner than later). The name change, however, is here to stay.

That's the kind of historical perspective we're trying to provide in the *"PWI* 50." The top 10 was full of WWE stories, such as the rebirth of "Hulkamania," Triple-H's World title win over Chris Jericho, the financial success of WrestleMania X8, the NWO invasion, and Triple-H's return to the company following a quadriceps injury.

The most important non-WWE story was the death of six-time former NWA World champion Lou Thesz, which we ranked number four. Ranking deaths is always touchy, and some purists might be offended that the WWE name change, brand extension, and "Hulkamania" outranked the passing of perhaps the greatest wrestler ever. But we're ranking Thesz' death and its relevance to today's wrestling scene, not his overall contributions. Still, a number-four ranking signifies a very important event.

Unfortunately, there were many deaths to report. Davey Boy Smith, Wahoo McDaniel, *PWI* founder Stanley Weston, Nelson Royal, Swede Hanson, and "Big" Dick Dudley were among those included in the *"PWI* 50." Last year, we had only one obituary, that of Johnny Valentine.

The absence of WCW and ECW made room for stories from other promotions. The Jarretts' establishment of NWA-TNA ranked 16. Last year, the top NWA story—Steve Corino's heavyweight title victory—ranked only 40. In 2002, news items from All-Japan, New Japan, World Wrestling All-Stars, the ECWA, FMW, Maryland Championship Wrestling, and Ring of Honor all made the cut.

In addition, we have included the top 10 moments from *Raw*

YEAR REPORT

and *Smackdown,* and a comprehensive report on pay-per-view matches. Six months removed from the *PWI Year In Review* issue, we select the Wrestler and Tag Team of the Half-Year. We also pick the Most Popular and Most Hated stars. In fact, every prominent wrestler is graded for his or her performance for the first semester of 2002. Remember, our mid-year ended on June 1.

Regarding our "Second-Half Predictions," keep in mind these prognostications aren't far-flung into the future. We'll seem incredibly smart or incredibly stupid six months from now. And don't forget to browse through our "Wacky & Weird" files. There were plenty of bizarre happenings to report—even without WCW to kick around anymore.

THE MID-YEAR REPORT

1

THE WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION BECOMES WORLD WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT

The WWF dropped the word "Federation" for "Entertainment" to resolve its decade-long legal battle with the World Wide Fund For Nature. Why the dispute? The World Wide Fund For Nature (commonly called the World Wildlife Fund) insisted that it had the exclusive right to use the acronym "WWF" because its organization had been founded even before the establishment of the World Wide Wrestling Federation in 1963. The Fund argued that the wrestling company began to infringe on its trademark in 1979, when the WWWF dropped "Wide" from its name and became simply the WWF.

The two sides reached an agreement in 1994, when the Federation agreed not to use the WWF acronym outside North America. The Fund asserted the placement of wwf.com on the World Wide Web and the Federation's international touring and merchandising violated that agreement.

The World Wildlife Fund won the case in a British high court in late-2000, and the World Wrestling Federation lost a subsequent appeal. With only one appeal remaining, the Federation decided to cut its losses and make the name change.

WWE announced the change on May 6 and produced a television spot, similar to its 1999 Super Bowl commercial, that depicted the name change in a humorous manner. "Get the 'F' out!" became the irreverent slogan.

Executives played down the impact of the name change by speculating that "Entertainment" was a more accurate reflection of their business anyway. Nevertheless, WWE lawyers conceded that the worldwide name change would cost millions of dollars.

2

THE WWF IMPLEMENTS BRAND EXTENSION

The idea emerged in March 2001, when the WWF paid AOL Time Warner $2.5-million for WCW and was left with one of two options: kill off WCW forever, or to operate it as a separate company. Vince McMahon, who had spent a decade trying to destroy the Turner-owned WCW, decided on the latter. For such a paltry investment, WCW could become a second—and potentially very lucrative—revenue stream.

TNN's hesitation to air a second prime time wrestling program, the WWF's inability to hire WCW's top stars, and the weak Alliance storyline doomed the project. While WCW was a bust, the McMahons thought of a better idea. Why not divide the WWF into two brands? That way, they would have the benefit of the strong WWF name and avoid the frustration of resuscitating the damaged WCW brand. *Raw* and *Smackdown* could feature separate rosters and storylines, thereby giving viewers compelling reasons to watch both programs.

Linda McMahon announced the brand extension on March 18, carefully avoiding the phrase "promotional split" so as not to give the impression the *Raw* and *Smackdown* leagues were watered down. Indeed, both brands stood to benefit from new and returning talent, including former Alliance members and developmental wrestlers from Ohio Valley Wrestling and the Heartland Wrestling Association.

The WWF creative team appointed Ric Flair the on-air owner of *Raw,* and Vince McMahon received *Smackdown.* A flip of the coin determined that McMahon would get the first draft pick. The Rock was his first choice, followed by superstars such as Hulk Hogan, Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, and Edge. Flair chose The Undertaker, the NWO (which had to be chosen as a unit), Rob Van Dam, Booker T, Kane, and Brock Lesnar. Later, free agent Steve Austin also joined *Raw.*

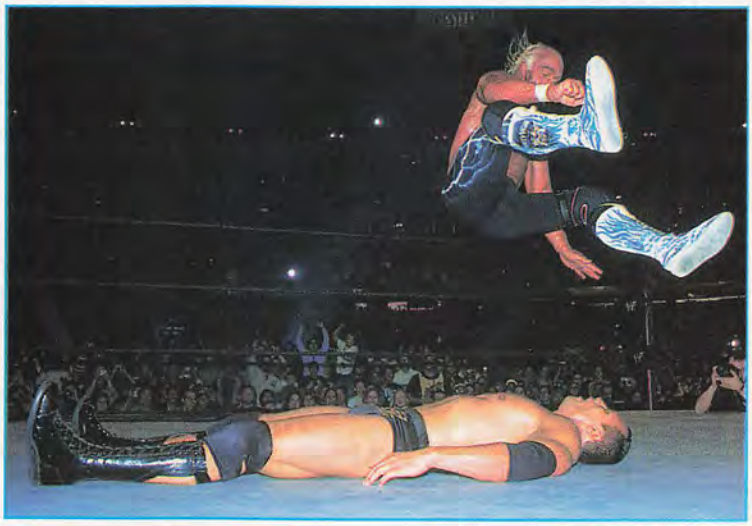
ROCK-HOGAN MATCH GIVES REBIRTH TO "HULKAMANIA"

Hulk Hogan, wearing the black and white colors of the NWO, was supposed to be the heel in this bout, but most of the 68,000 fans at the Toronto SkyDome embraced the nostalgic remnants of "Hulkamania" and watched it grow into something huge. The fans recognized the familiar flinches, the look of determination, and, finally, Hogan's eye of the tiger. Before long, nearly the entire stadium was booing the hell out of The Rock … and resurrecting their hero, Hulk Hogan.

The rumblings of "Hulkamania" gave way to a thunderous chorus when Hogan kicked out from the Rock bottom. The fans went wild as Hogan began "hulking up." It was as if people no longer saw The Rock. They saw The Iron Sheik, Andre the Giant, and The Ultimate Warrior. When Hogan went for the big boot and legdrop, it was 1987 all over again.

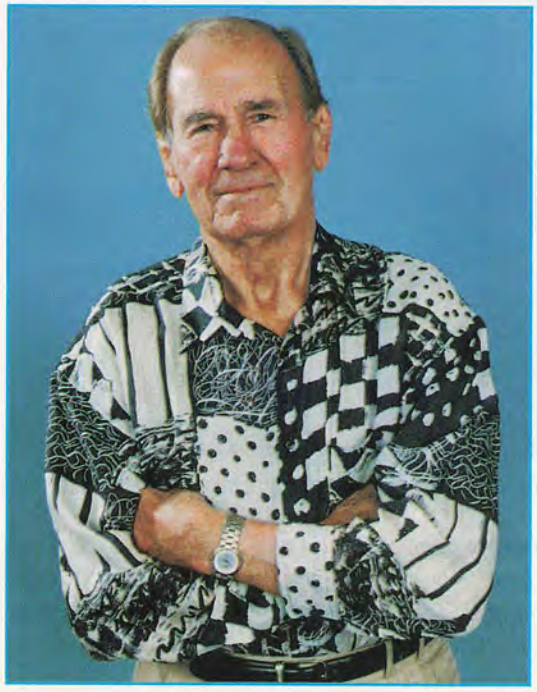
But "The Great One" kicking out of the legdrop and his delivery of two more Rock bottoms and a people's elbow reminded everyone it was 2002. The Rock got the pin and, in his words, earned the right to call himself "the absolute best ever." Hogan didn't win the match, yet he regained respect.

"Ho-gan! Ho-gan!" chants followed him at *Raw, Smackdown,* and various house shows. Fans didn't want to let go of the feelings they had at WrestleMania X8. The wave of support carried Hogan to a shot at WWE champ Triple-H at Backlash—and a sixth WWF/WWE World title reign. Despite the lure of retirement, Hogan remained a main-event fixture on *Smackdown* as the half-year ended.



LOU THESZ DIES AT 86

On April 27, only three days after his 86th birthday, and with his wife, Charlie, by his side, Lou Thesz died in a Florida hospital following triple-bypass surgery. Because Thesz had remained physically fit until this bout with heart disease and had been a fixture on the wrestling scene for most of the 20th century, his death was hard to accept by his many admirers. Most wrestling historians consider him the greatest champion ever.



His six world title reigns spanned most of the years between 1937 and 1966. At age 21, Thesz defeated Everett Marshall in St. Louis to become the youngest champion of all-time, a record that stands to this day. His longest reign lasted from 1948 to 1956, during wrestling's first golden age of television. Also, Thesz is the only wrestler to have competed in seven decades, from the 1930s to the 1990s. At age 74, he lost to his 27-year-old protege, Masa Chono, in Hamamatsu, Japan, on December 26, 1990.

Until the WWF bought WCW in 2001, Thesz had come closer than anyone to establishing an undisputed world championship. His defeat of Baron Michele Leone in Los Angeles to merge the California version of the world title with the NWA championship drew a record gate of $103,277.

When *PWI* asked Thesz to pinpoint his greatest contribution to wrestling, he responded, "My greatest contribution is staying loyal to wrestling. I've stayed focused on wrestling, not rasslin' or show business."

Thesz' ashes were scattered in the Merrimac River during a small private service in St. Louis.

5

TRIPLE-H CAPTURES WWF WORLD TITLE FROM CHRIS JERICHO

There was an air of uncertainty about this match at WrestleMania X8. Both WWF champ Chris Jericho and Triple-H are known for delivering strong matches, but could they deliver one of WrestleMania caliber, especially under these circumstances?

Even as the industry's first undisputed champion, Jericho had rarely defended his title in *Raw* or *Smackdown* main events, let alone the biggest pay-per-view of the year (perhaps of all-time). Triple-H, who had spent eight months recovering from a torn quadriceps, had only recently returned to the WWF. Then there was the feeling of Jericho-Helmsley being an anti-climax because The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan, perhaps the most anticipated 'Mania bout in a decade, had occurred earlier on the show.

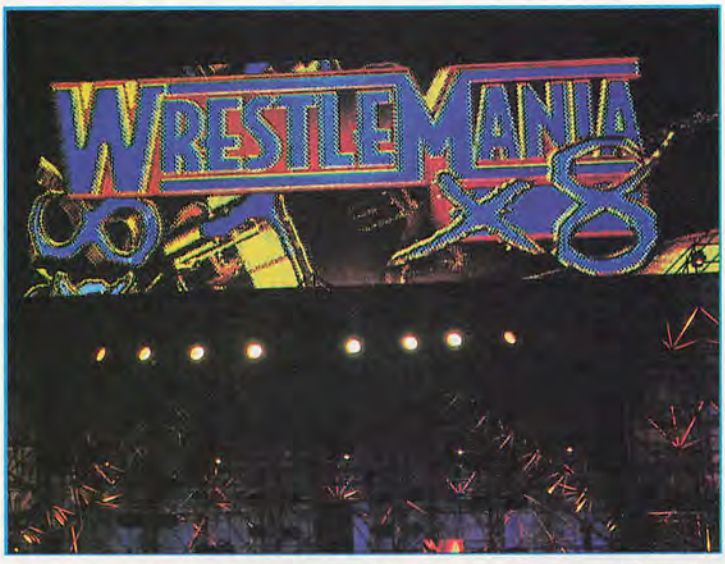
Some built-in factors helped lower expectations for this match. Jericho had aggravated Triple-H's quad injury on television, which would allow Helmsley to hobble—if necessary—without disgrace. Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley's constant interference would "spoil" the opportunity for a classic athletic encounter. And putting a rather average women's match before Jericho-Helmsley gave the crowd an appetite again.

Helmsley and Jericho exceeded the lowered expectations. Jericho paid homage to Bret Hart by trapping Helmsley in a figure-four leglock around the ringpost, exciting the Toronto audience. Triple-H's spinebuster on Jericho, along with a DDT on a steel chair, were other highlights. But the greatest crowd-pleaser was Triple-H's use of the pedigree on his wife, Stephanie, at the 17-minute mark. Then, after fending off a pedigree from Jericho and a chair shot, "The Game" retaliated with his own pedigree. Three seconds later, Triple-H earned his fifth WWF World title.

Helmsley-Jericho won't compare to Rock-Hogan as Steamboat-Savage did to Hogan-Andre 15 years earlier, but it was enough to become one of the major events of 2002.

6

WRESTLEMANIA X8 SHATTERS RECORDS



Would WrestleMania X8 be an even more spectacular financial success than last year's event? Actually, WWF executives were confident as early as November 5, 2001, when it was revealed that X8's ticket sales had already surpassed the $3.5-million live gate generated by X-Seven. The WWF had done this by selling a mere 52,000 tickets (at higher prices), which included travel packages for fans in 15 countries.

The high attendance of 68,237 in the cavernous Toronto SkyDome ballooned the live gate total to $3.9-million. This was aided by the corporate sponsor support of Sour Skittles, Playstation, and Pizza Pizza. Another 100,000 fans attended the Fan Axxess festival, which lasted three days. Also worthy of note, the WWF helped raise more than $90,000 (Canadian) in a four-day event for the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Canadian Special Olympics.

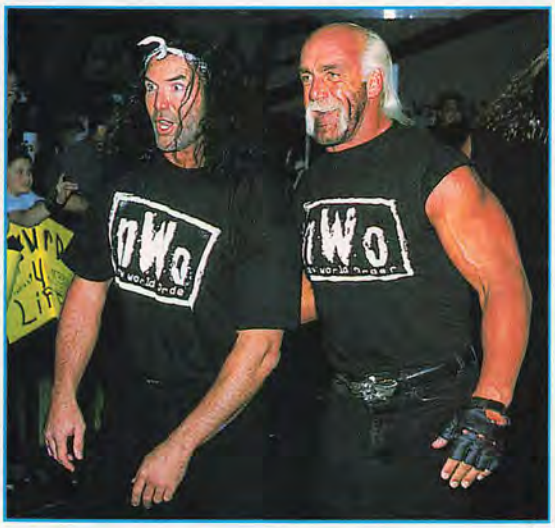
WrestleMania X8's attendance surpassed that of WrestleMania VI, also held at the SkyDome. The Ultimate Warrior vs. Hulk Hogan drew 67,678. More seats were made available at X8, enabling this year's event to break the record. Both of those events pale in comparison to the Hulk Hogan-Paul Orndorff main event at Exhibition Stadium, also in Toronto, that attracted a whopping 74,080 fans on August 28, 1986. And that match wasn't even on pay-per-view! Without the 'Mania merchandising machine behind it, however, the live gate was less than half of WrestleMania X8's.

THE NEW WORLD ORDER INVADES THE WWF

"Are Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, and Hulk Hogan a worthwhile risk?" When the 2002 *"PWI* Poll" posed this question before the NWO's entry into the WWF, only 55 percent of industry insiders thought they were. "McMahon thinks he can take the WWF to the next level with the NWO, but it's like saying an athlete can win the Olympics with a severe case of cancer," wrote one respondent.

With Hall and Nash in their early-40s, and Hogan at 48, insiders didn't think these veterans could keep pace with stars in their prime such as The Rock, Steve Austin, Triple-H, Kurt Angle, and Chris Jericho.

And their entry seemed less than dramatic. Hogan, Hall, and Nash made their heralded WWF return in backstage vignettes during February's No Way Out. Not surprisingly, they interfered in the main event, costing Austin his chance of winning the WWF World title from Jericho. Hogan's feud with The Rock and Hall's angle with Austin began almost immediately for the buildup to WrestleMania X8.



Four months later, the following question can be posed: *"Were* Hall, Nash, and Hogan a worthwhile risk?" There is a mixed answer. Despite delivering some quality matches, Hall's personal behavior led to his release from WWE by June. Nash has wrestled very few matches, spending most of his WWE stint nursing a torn biceps.

Hogan is a different case. His match against The Rock at WrestleMania X8 garnered an amazing reaction, jumpstarting a nostalgic wave of "Hulkamania." With Hogan's early ouster from the group, the NWO has failed to become a revolutionary force of any kind. The entrance of X-Pac, The Big Show, and Booker T—along with the departure of Hall—made the unit resemble the old NWO black and white "B" team. The NWO didn't have a lasting effect on WWF ratings, either.

Considering Hogan's positive impact, recruiting the NWO was a worthwhile risk. But, so far, it seems that hiring Hogan—without Hall and Nash—might have been the wiser financial move.

DAVEY BOY SMITH DIES AT 39

Former WWF and WCW star Davey Boy Smith was found dead of an apparent heart attack on May 17 while vacationing with his girlfriend, Andrea Hart, in Invermere, British Columbia. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police confirmed that Smith had died in his hotel room.

Smith is best known, along with The Dynamite Kid, for leading an unprecedented boom in the WWF tag team division during the mid-1980s. The British Bulldogs captivated WWF fans during their tag team title quest, which culminated in a victory over Brutus Beefcake and Greg Valentine at WrestleMania II. They reigned for nearly a year. After Dynamite retired due to nagging injuries and an auto accident, Smith—billing himself simply as "The British Bulldog"—embarked on a successful singles career.

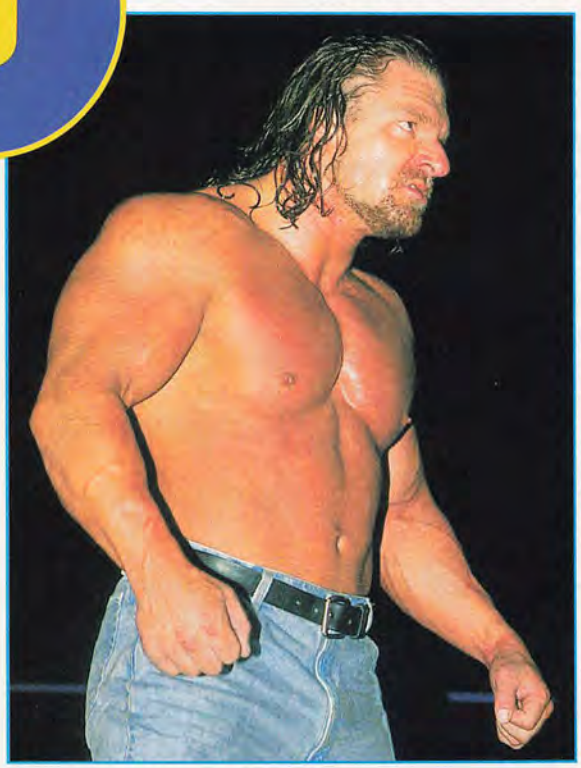
His greatest singles accomplishment was his SummerSlam '92 match against Bret Hart at London's Wembley Stadium, where 80,000 British fans watched Smith's Intercontinental title victory over the "Hitman." But his I-C title reign was shorter than expected, and he jumped to WCW and challenged Big Van Vader for the World title.

Smith's last great run was in the late-1990s as a member of The Hart Foundation. He and Owen Hart held the WWF World tag team title, and he defeated Owen in Berlin, Germany, to become the first WWF European champion. Along with brothers-in-law Bret Hart and Jim Neidhart, Smith again defected to WCW for another lackluster stint. Following a life-threatening bone infection, Smith returned to the WWF in 1999, won the hardcore title, and had a high-profile spot in a six-pack challenge for the vacant World championship in September of that year. Personal issues plagued his comeback, however, and the WWF released him in 2000.

Less than a month before his death, Smith and his 16-year-old son, Harry, wrestled at an independent show. Davey Boy hoped to be part of a father-son tag team in WWE someday.

9

TRIPLE-H RETURNS TO THE WWF



"Just in case you forgot, let me tell you just who the hell I am. I am 'The Game,' and you can bet your ass I'm back!"

Those were the two sentences Triple-H uttered during his memorable return to *Raw* on January 7. Then what made it memorable? The sheer intensity of the crowd at Madison Square Garden conveyed the importance of the moment. Rarely has an audience demonstrated such an outpouring of respect for any athlete or entertainer without any prompting.

Count on Kurt Angle to ruin the moment. He interrupted Triple-H by announcing his intention to win the Royal Rumble. Triple-H removed his shirt to reveal a Herculean physique and pummeled the Olympian. Despite the incredible live reaction to Triple-H's return, it fell flat in terms of Helmsley's response and overall storylines. One of the WWF's most dramatic moments was reduced to a forced plug for the Royal Rumble.

The WWF heavily hyped Triple-H's return, resulting in an above-average rating of 4.9. Triple-H's comeback failed to have an impact on the WWF's disappointing ratings. *Raw* dropped back to 4.5 the next week and mustered only 4.6 on the edition following the Rumble.

By placing himself in the Rumble, and announcing his intention of defeating Chris Jericho for the World title, "The Game" firmly re-established himself in the top tier. In fact, Triple-H enjoyed a bit more momentum upon his return than he had been enjoying at the time of his quadriceps injury in May of last year.

10

KEIJI MUTO JUMPS TO ALL-JAPAN

Imagine The Rock or Steve Austin jumping to WCW during its last dying days. That gives some perspective on the impact of Keiji Muto's jump from New Japan to All-Japan in early-February. This shattered a tenuous working agreement between New Japan and All-Japan designed in part to fend off the emerging NOAH promotion. Due to that agreement, Muto had already become the All-Japan Triple Crown champion.

Of course, there is a tremendous difference between Muto reigning as Triple Crown champion with New Japan's consent and Muto actually becoming a moneymaker as a contract player for All-Japan. But he was able to do so because Japanese wrestlers traditionally sign new one-year deals. Muto and Taiyo Kea, already an All-Japan employee, vacated the IWGP International tag team title to make the jump. Adding to New Japan's problems, IWGP junior heavyweight champion Kendo Ka Shin, Satoshi Kojima, and several front office employees also announced their defections. All-Japan also signed former WWF developmental wrestler Kaz Hayashi.

For the first time since Mitsuharu Misawa and his allies left the company to form NOAH, All-Japan found itself with a strong roster.

Amazingly, this turnover has spilled into the political realm. Hiroshi Hase, a former New Japan star who had previously left for All-Japan, was accused of illegally contacting Muto and others before the expiration of their contracts. Hase serves in the Japanese Diet, which is similar to the U.S. Senate.

WAHOO McDANIEL DIES AFTER LONG ILLNESS

Chief Wahoo McDaniel, who enjoyed great success in both football and wrestling, died of complications from renal failure and diabetes on the night of April 18 in Houston. He was 63. McDaniel had spent the last four years of his life without functioning kidneys and suffered a stroke in October 2001.

McDaniel played in the American Football League with the Chargers, Oilers, and Broncos before attracting a cult following during his time with the New York Jets in the mid-1960s. He pursued a wrestling career during the off-season and achieved his big break when Jets owner Sonny Werblin put him in touch with Vince McMahon Sr. of the WWWF. The Louisiana native finished his AFL career with the Miami Dolphins in 1969.

He wrestled in nearly every major territory over the next 20 years. During the 1970s, his greatest matches were against NWA World champion Dory Funk Jr., Fritz Von Erich, Johnny Valentine, and an up-and-coming Ric Flair.

McDaniel was most popular in the Mid-Atlantic area, where his battles against emerging heels such as Flair, Greg Valentine, Roddy Piper, Magnificent Muraco, and Sgt. Slaughter affirmed his legendary status. He challenged NWA champ Ric Flair and AWA champion Nick Bockwinkel in the early-1980s.

In the middle of that decade, McDaniel turned heel, a move that helped boost the careers of Rick Steamboat, Magnum T.A., and Lex Luger. He became a fan favorite again in 1986 and feuded with Manny Fernandez, Jim Garvin, and Nikita Koloff.

The former U.S. champion announced his retirement in 1989, but soon returned to action for South Atlantic Pro Wrestling. McDaniel's final match was in 1996.

TRIPLE-H WINS THE ROYAL RUMBLE

"The Game" accomplished one of the few career goals that had thus far eluded him by outlasting 29 other men in the Royal Rumble. That victory made Triple-H the most decorated wrestler in WWF history, with the World heavyweight, World tag team, Intercontinental, and European titles—and the 1997 King of the Ring—to his credit.

Unlike other Rumble winners with marathon or dramatic come-from-behind victories, Triple-H was the 24th person to enter the ring, with only Steve Austin left in the ring upon his entrance. Then Triple-H's theme music absorbed much of the two-minute interval. After a brief battle, the former World tag champs demonstrated some of their old teamwork by eliminating the next two entrants, The Hurricane and Faarooq.

The final four consisted of Helmsley, Austin, Kurt Angle, and Mr. Perfect. Angle eliminated Austin, and Triple-H tossed out Perfect. That left "The Game" to face Angle, who had interrupted Triple-H's comeback moment on *Raw* a couple of weeks earlier.

Angle thought he won the Rumble when he backdropped Triple-H over the top rope, but Helmsley caught himself before his feet touched the floor. As Angle celebrated his "victory," Triple-H re-entered the ring, attacked Angle from behind, and clotheslined him over the top rope for the real victory.

Triple-H's Rumble win earned him a match against World champion Chris Jericho at WrestleMania X8.

13

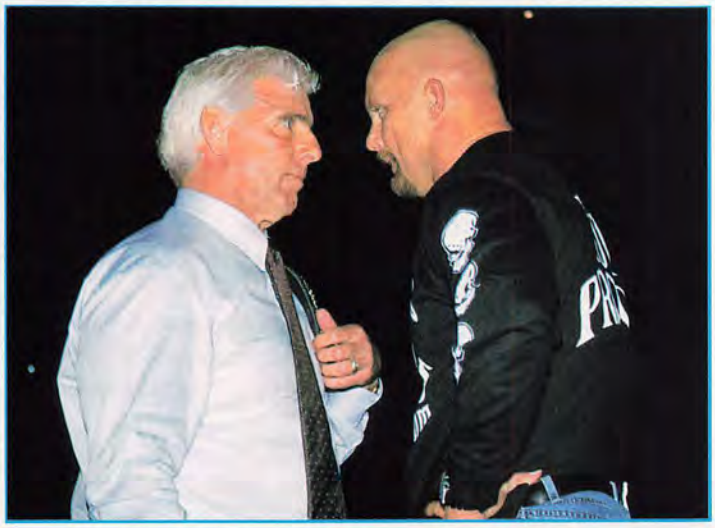
STEVE AUSTIN-RIC FLAIR FEUD SPARKS *RAW*

The six-week feud between Steve Austin and Ric Flair could have been a weak replay of the Austin-Vince McMahon war that spawned countless takeoffs in WCW, ECW, and most independent promotions. Even the attempt to rekindle the Austin-McMahon feud in late-2001 didn't work so well.

So what made the Austin-Flair feud so intriguing?

In this case, Austin was battling more than the on-air owner of *Raw*. He was fighting the legendary "Nature Boy," the 16-time world champion. Flair had enhanced his cardiovascular training in recent months, which helped improve his stamina and diminished his midsection paunch.

Flair had made every attempt to make Austin feel welcome on *Raw*. But "The Texas Rattlesnake" recoiled and snapped at Flair's polite gestures. Flair infuriated "Stone-Cold" at Backlash when, as special referee, he counted The Undertaker's pinfall although Austin's foot was on the ropes. The Undertaker was awarded the victory and the WWE World title shot that went along with it. Flair said it was an innocent mistake. Austin thought otherwise and sought payback.



That led Flair to bash Austin with a steel chair during a six-man tag team match on *Raw*, and the "Nature Boy" to team with The Big Show in a handicap bout against "Stone-Cold" at Judgment Day. Austin won that encounter, as well as winning Flair's services as a "personal assistant" in a classic one-on-one match on *Raw*.

The tension between Austin and Flair was the most interesting aspect of *Raw* throughout the spring months.

14

WWFE AND DIRECTV RESOLVE STANDOFF

DirecTV customers had to forego WWF pay-per-views for four months—missing No Mercy, Survivor Series, Vengeance, and the Royal Rumble—until the satellite network reportedly agreed to terms. WWFE had asserted that it should receive a higher percentage of revenue for PPV events because, unlike cable companies, DirecTV does not have the expense of marketing events through distributors.

The original contract had expired in January 2001, but WWFE continued to allow DirecTV to carry its pay-per-views while renegotiations were ongoing. Unable to reach a deal, WWFE opted for stronger tactics in October of last year, leading to the blackout.

The companies publicly called a truce on February 7 and announced a new deal that would be in effect until August 2003. The agreement was reached just in time for No Way Out, featuring the main event of Chris Jericho vs. Steve Austin and the NWO's entry into the WWF. Both sides were pleased with the revenue generated by that PPV and were poised to enjoy greater returns for WrestleMania X8. DirecTV also continued carrying the Fanatic Series, beginning with *Before They Were Superstars* in March.

DirecTV is the largest satellite provider in the United States, boasting 10.7 million customers. It is still unclear exactly how much money WWFE and DirecTV lost during the blackout.

15 HULK HOGAN BEATS TRIPLE-H FOR WWF WORLD TITLE

How does Hulk Hogan's WWE title victory at Backlash compare to his previous five WWF World title wins? History will make that judgment, but one thing's for sure: Triple-H is a lot tougher than The Iron Sheik.

Hogan needed only five minutes to demolish the Iranian madman on January 23, 1984, but it took him a full 22 minutes to defeat "The Game" 18 years later, on April 21, 2002. Despite his recent popularity, Triple-H entered the match exuding a certain coolness that fans didn't necessarily appreciate. Triple-H's calculating approach made it that much easier for fans to embrace "Hulkamania."

And that began in the early going, as Hogan and Helmsley engaged in a test of strength. Hogan had a three-inch height advantage over Triple-H, while Helmsley's physique could be described as, ironically, more hulking. The dramatic test of strength lasted nearly five minutes, with Triple-H powering Hogan to the mat and "Hollywood" fighting back to a standing position. Many fans booed Triple-H despite his use of legal holds. They rejoiced when Hogan caught Triple-H with the big boot and delivered the legdrop.

At that point, Chris Jericho ran into the ring and interrupted Hogan's pin attempt. When Triple-H later used the pedigree on Hogan, The Undertaker appeared and hit Helmsley with a steel chair. Hogan clotheslined Undertaker off the ring apron and dropped another leg on Triple-H. This time, he got the three-count.

As Hogan posed with the World title belt, a bloody Triple-H arose and extended his hand to his childhood hero. Hogan accepted, and the two men shook hands till end the show.

16 THE JARRETTS ESTABLISH NWA: TOTAL NONSTOP ACTION

Other than the McMahons, is there anyone with a few million dollars *and* some good wrestling ideas? Practically every industry insider has responded with the same answer: Jerry Jarrett. The former Memphis promoter owns a very lucrative construction business. His son, Jeff Jarrett, is an active wrestler. There has to be wrestling venture in here somewhere.

After some coaxing, Jerry Jarrett decided to launch a wrestling company to specialize in the pay-per-view market, skipping weekly cable and syndicated shows entirely. His idea was to hold weekly pay-per-views at a cost of $9.95 to consumers.

As a result, Jarrett's J Sports & Entertainment company will have exclusive control over his promotion, Total Nonstop Action, while being affiliated with the NWA and having access to a wide range of independent stars. Jeff Jarrett, Ken Shamrock, A.J. Styles, and The Shane Twins are only a few of the wrestlers expected to be mainstays on the roster. The Jarretts also added wrestling divas such as Francine, Alicia Webb (Ryan Shamrock), and Bobcat to provide plenty of T & A on TNA. That lends credence to reports suggesting Vince Russo is an unofficial, unpaid consultant.

Alternating pay-per-views will broadcast live on Wednesdays at 8 p.m. Eastern, with portions of a second show being taped at the same venue for the following week (there will be some pretaped features on the non-live weeks as well). Viewers willing to pay in advance might receive a discounted rate at some point.

NWA-TNA's first pay-per-view was scheduled for June 19 in Huntsville, Alabama. There was to be a battle royal for the vacant NWA championship. Scott Hall, who was recently released by WWE, was among the top stars slated to participate.

17 KAWADA'S ALL-JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN REIGN CUT SHORT BY INJURY

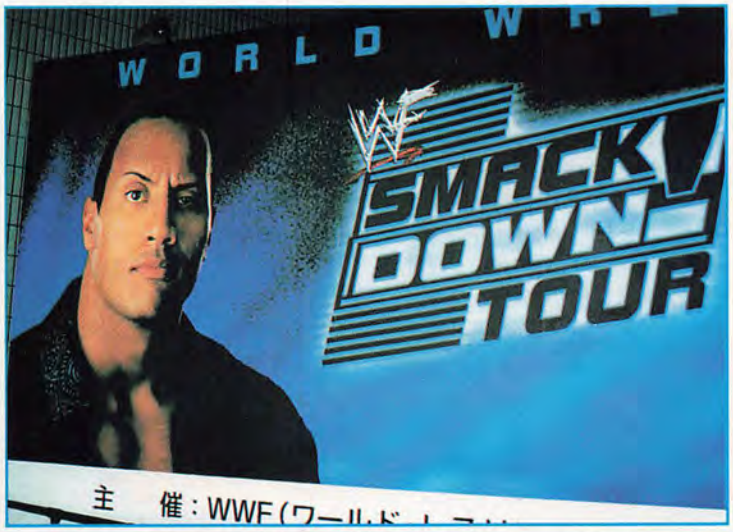
If it weren't for bad luck, Toshiaki Kawada wouldn't have any luck at all. On February 24, Kawada did manage to defeat Keiji Muto, fresh off his defection from New Japan, for the All-Japan Triple Crown. He wrestled a brilliant match and downed Muto with his finisher, the folding power bomb.

Only a month into his fourth Triple Crown reign, physicians discovered that Kawada had suffered serious ligament damage in his right knee during All-Japan's Champions Carnival tour. He was advised to stay on the sidelines for six months. Kawada sorrowfully vacated the championship.

This seemed to be part of a fateful pattern. Kawada had defeated Mitsuharu Misawa for his third Triple Crown on January 22, 1999, but broke his arm during the match. He was forced to vacate the titles shortly after. Other occurrences, including freak eye injuries, have derailed Kawada's career in the past.

"Every time I achieve my goal as Triple Crown champion, something happens to steal my moment of triumph," said the man *puroresu* fans often refer to as "Hard Luck" Kawada. "I have defeated the greatest wrestlers to hold the Triple Crown, including Muto and Misawa. It seems that my body defeats me when my opponents cannot."

18 THE WWF TOURS ASIA



The Rock, Ric Flair, and Chris Jericho were among the superstars who embarked on the *Smackdown* tour, the WWF's most significant venture in Asia to date. The three-city itinerary included Tokyo's Yokohama Arena on March 1, Singapore's Indoor Stadium on March 3, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on March 4.

All three events sold out. The Crown Prince of Brunei, Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, and his family attended the Singapore show. Dignitaries at the Malaysia event included the Minister of Youth and Sports, the Minister of Tourism, and members of various native royal families.

"We were prepared to translate the dialogue in the show into the native language," said Shane McMahon, who participated in each of the events. "However, the fans booed the translation and only wanted to hear the dialogue as they do on our programming. It was an unbelievable experience."

The *Smackdown* tour was part of an overall plan to expand into international markets. The McMahons have already established an office in London to coordinate business outside of North America. More extensive tours of the U.K. and Germany are also in the works.

"Through our international television partners, the World Wrestling Federation has built a strong foundation for further global expansion," WWF Executive Vice President of International Business Development Roger Marment said at the time. "Live-event touring is the next logical step."

19 THE UNDERTAKER BEATS HULK HOGAN FOR WWE WORLD TITLE

Hulk Hogan won't forget how The Undertaker, a baby-faced newcomer, beat him for the WWF World title at Survivor Series 1991. Ric Flair interfered on The Undertaker's behalf during that match, and Hogan never got much of a chance to even the score. Likewise, The Undertaker probably remembered that nervous feeling he had in the pit of his stomach as he prepared to meet the WWF's greatest icon a decade ago.

No doubt The Undertaker would remember that in disgust. Undertaker has never felt nervous in the ring since that time. Heading into their showdown at Judgment Day, both Undertaker and Hogan wanted to prove some things to each other … and to themselves.

WWE champ Hulk Hogan, not taking any chances, began whipping The Undertaker with his weightlifting belt before the bell. The Undertaker might have made the mistake of wrestling his 1991 match, when he had a huge advantage in speed and agility.

In 2002, however, The Undertaker's knees have slowed him a bit, enabling Hogan to avoid one of "Big Evil's" dives and, on another occasion, grab hold of him on the top turnbuckle. Likewise, 'Taker surprised "Hollywood" by kicking out after taking his legdrop.

The dynamics changed when Vince McMahon walked to ringside and distracted the referee. Hogan pulled McMahon into the ring and hit *him* with a legdrop. Taking advantage of the breather, Undertaker leveled Hogan with a chair shot across the back. Undertaker executed the choke-slam and was awarded his fourth WWF/WWE World title.

Undertaker celebrated his championship victory in despicable fashion by jamming a steel chair into Hogan's throat. Hogan seriously contemplated retirement as a result.

20 WWA HOLDS ITS FIRST LIVE PAY-PER-VIEW IN THE UNITED STATES

Rock concert promoter Andrew McManus entered the wrestling business with realistic expectations. He focused his promotion—World Wrestling All-Stars—on satisfying niche markets otherwise neglected by WWE. McManus organized tours for Australia and Europe, where fans see WWE television but rarely have opportunities to attend live shows.

Instead of trying to secure a national cable contract in America, the Australia-born McManus decided pay-per-view was the appropriate venue in the States. WWA had already aired one pay-per-view in the American market, a prerecorded show emanating from Melbourne, Australia. The next step was the Revolution pay-per-view, airing live from Las Vegas' Aladdin Resort and Casino on February 24.

For the cost of $19.95, fans saw WWA champ Jeff Jarrett beat Brian Christopher, Devon Storm defeat Sabu, and Eddie Guerrero win the international cruiserweight title in a three-way match also involving Psicosis and Juventud Guerrera, among other matches. Jeremy Borash, Mark Madden, and Disco Inferno were the announcers at ringside.

Highlights from the show included Christopher's respectable effort against Jarrett, despite being a last-minute replacement for Randy Savage, with whom McManus could not come to financial terms. Another would be Scott Steiner tossing midgets Puppet and Tio as far as possible.

Lowlights? They would include Bret Hart and Larry Zbyszko's bitter and cliched promos, encouraging the crowd to remain quiet by piping in the ongoing commentary, and the ratty ring attire worn by the team of Native Blood.

21

THE SCORPION KING SETS RECORDS

The Rock, in his first starring role, helped *The Scorpion King* earn $36.2-million during the first three days of its release, a record for the month of April. Released on April 22, *The Scorpion King* bodyslammed the competition. *Changing Lanes,* which had been the box office champ the previous week, dropped to $11.1-million after *The Scorpion King's* release. *The Matrix* held the previous April record, with an opening weekend of $27.8-million in 1999.

The Scorpion King earned another $17.6-million the following weekend, bringing its 10-day total to an impressive $60.8-million.

Of course, *The Scorpion King* is the prequel to 1999's *The Mummy* and 2001's *The Mummy Returns,* which featured The Rock in a small but captivating role. *The Scorpion King* didn't have the benefit of premiering on Memorial Day weekend, as the previous movies did, however, making its $36.2-million seem relatively meager compared to the $68.2-million earned by *The Mummy Returns* and the $43.4-million earned by *The Mummy* during their respective first weekends.

"It's not a big-budgeted film, and we knew going in it was never expected to do $40-million or $50-million on opening weekend," explained Rocco in a previous interview with CBS News. "What we have is a terrific actor who's charismatic and charming. He can act and brings a presence to the screen we haven't seen in a very long time."

Many critics have compared The Rock to Arnold Schwarzenegger and have touted "The Great One" as Hollywood's next great action hero.

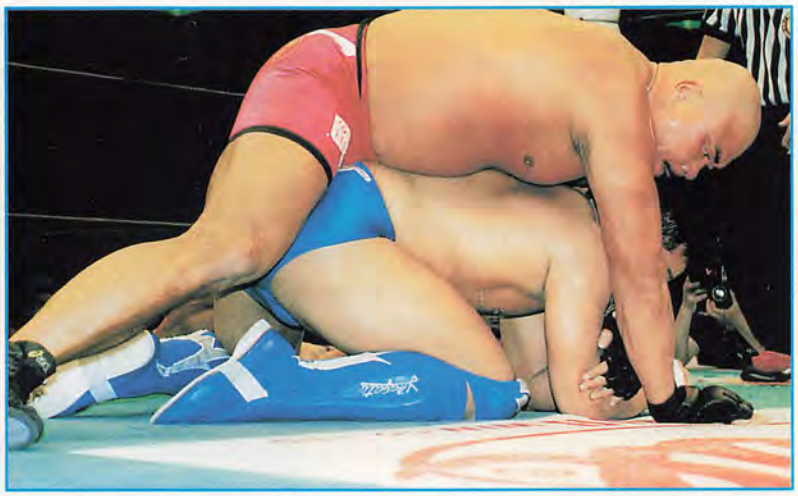
22

TADAO YASUDA WINS IWGP TITLE TOURNAMENT

Imagine an aging, bald-headed veteran upsetting one of the top stars of the day for a major championship. Actually, WWF fans didn't mind seeing Hulk Hogan beat Triple-H for the World title at Backlash. But a considerable number of New Japan fans were disturbed when the 310-pound Tadao Yasuda claimed his first IWGP heavyweight title.

The overweight, middle-aged Yasuda defeated Yuji Nagata in a tournament final on February 16 in Tokyo. Unlike American fans, who have grown accustomed to world championships being used as storyline props, *puroresu* enthusiasts take their major titles much more seriously. In their minds, a champion should genuinely represent the best a particular company has to offer.

And Tadao Yasuda was the best New Japan could do? Yasuda's elevation reflected New Japan owner Antonio Inoki's desire to promote wrestlers with mixed martial arts experience—and Yasuda, with a background in Japan's Pride promotion, fit the bill.



But Inoki quickly decided a change was in order. While Yasuda did defeat Hiroyoshi Tenzan in a title defense, he eventually lost the belt to Yuji Nagata.

The title reign of the slow-moving Yasuda ended after only 48 days, which is considered a failure to most Japanese fans. Hulk Hogan, on the other hand, was touted as having ridden another wave of "Hulkamania" in a WWF/WWE title reign that lasted only 28 days.

WWF CHAMPION JERICHO BEATS ROCK AT THE ROYAL RUMBLE

The oddsmakers did not favor Chris Jericho as he headed into this Royal Rumble showdown with The Rock. Although Jericho had become the industry's first undisputed world champion by defeating The Rock and Steve Austin the previous month, most fans viewed Y2J as a "surprise" champion, not one capable of a long title reign.

Jericho was determined to prove his detractors wrong. When The Rock mounted a vigorous offense at the opening bell, Jericho rolled out to the arena floor to break his momentum. Jericho clearly did not feel pressured to attempt a quick pinfall. He neutralized The Rock with a chinlock for several minutes. When Rock finally broke free, Jericho regained the momentum and stopped him cold with a lionsault. Jericho didn't go for the pin yet, though. Instead, he delivered another lionsault to knock more wind out of "The Great One." This time, Jericho went for the cover, but The Rock kicked out.

Jericho's game plan became evident when fellow Canadians Lance Storm and Christian bounded into the ring. The Rock punched both of them. Jericho took advantage of the distraction and, as he did often in his WCW World title series against The Rock, flattened him with his own move: the Rock bottom.

After The Rock accidentally knocked down the referee, Nick Patrick ran to the ring to officiate. He refused to count The Rock's pin attempt on Jericho after a DDT, and again after "The Brahma Bull" delivered the people's elbow for a sure victory. As The Rock argued with the ref, Jericho caught him with a low blow and scored the pinfall with his feet on the ropes for leverage.

DAN SEVERN'S TITLE VICTORY EMBROILS THE NWA IN SCANDAL

For the first several minutes of their March 9 bout, Shinya Hashimoto's title defense against former champ Dan Severn seemed like another NWA classic. The 3,000 fans in Tokyo's Korakuen Hall were respectful of the two world-renowned shoot-fighters, although they had good reason to dislike Severn. In an uncharacteristic lack of sportsmanship, the Michigan native had attacked Hashimoto after his title victory over Gary Steele and previous champ Steve Corino four months earlier.

That would be considered trivial in light of what was to come.

After Hashimoto kicked out of a pin attempt following Severn's devastating belly-to-belly suplex, NWA President Jim Miller took the matter into his own hands. He walked to ringside to confer with chief referee Fred Richards. There was a heated exchange, but Miller seemed to get his way.

Severn went for a pin attempt a couple of minutes later, and Richards counted very fast. Hashimoto barely kicked out in time. Richards counted very slowly when Hashimoto tried to pin his challenger.

Hashimoto and the Japanese crowd sensed the crooked officiating. As Hashimoto argued with Richards, Severn caught him with a bridged German suplex to earn the quick three-count.

Zero-One officials protested the decision as President Miller danced around the ring. Severn dramatically threw down the NWA title belt, insisting he didn't want it under those circumstances. He didn't go so far as to vacate the championship, however.

25 WWE UNVEILS NEW SECONDARY PROGRAM LINEUP

For diehard loyalists of *Excess, Jakked, Metal,* and *Attitude,* WWE's near-total revamping of its secondary programs was bad news. Assuming there are very few self-described *"Jakked* diehards," the changes probably didn't make much difference. But the McMahons are hoping they will, at least enough to entice you to sample their new programming.

Excess' run on TNN ended after less than a year. The first hour of the highlight program was replaced by *Velocity, Smackdown's* equivalent to *Raw's Sunday Night Heat,* which remained intact on MTV. New WWE announcer Marc Loyd and *Tough Enough* trainer Al Snow were named hosts of that show. *Excess'* second hour, from 11 to 12 p.m. Eastern, was replaced by *Confidential.* Hosted by the returning "Mean" Gene Okerlund, this magazine format program consists of the kind of insider interviews and tidbits that characterized his old WCW 900 line. The first edition, in fact, featured Shawn Michaels' insight into his Survivor Series 1997 match with Bret Hart, and provided a ratings boost.

And what replaced *Jakked* and *Metal? The Bottom Line* (a *Raw* highlight program) and *After Burn* (a *Smackdown* highlight program). Both of those programs are available via syndication. *The Bottom Line* also replaced *Attitude,* a highlight show hosted by Chris Leary that was exclusive to the WB. Jonathan Coachman hosts *TBL,* which airs on Saturdays at 8 p.m. on that network.

26 BILL GOLDBERG BECOMES FREE AGENT

According to the *"PWI* Poll," 38 percent of wrestling insiders were convinced that Bill Goldberg would *never* wrestle in the WWF. Only 23 percent thought Goldberg would be under WWF contract by the end of 2002.

If Goldberg is willing, and if the fans have their way, "Da Man" could be competing in WWE by the end of the year. That's quite a change, considering that Goldberg himself said he would be "crazy" to sacrifice an AOL Time Warner contract that was paying him millions of dollars to sit home for the next two years for a hectic, physically demanding career in WWE.

Ironically, it was AOL Time Warner that offered Goldberg a generous buyout for most if not all the money owed to him. It was a win-win situation for both parties. AOL Time Warner, which had experienced a particularly bad quarter, saw the chance to write off the Goldberg payout as just another big loss. And the settlement allowed Goldberg to pocket a fortune and explore more moneymaking opportunities in WWE and elsewhere, including in Pride, New Japan, and NWA-TNA.

But Goldberg may have some repair work to do if he has any intention of joining Vince McMahon's company. He has been one of WWE's most outspoken critics during the past couple of years.

Last year, Goldberg told the *Desert Sun* the following: "I personally believe that everything I stood for when I got into the ring would be compromised and succumbed to the circus-like atmosphere that's out there, and that's putting it mildly. I would be an imbecile if I gave up half my money to work for a company I didn't respect."

PWI FOUNDER STANLEY WESTON DIES AT 82

Stanley Weston, the long-time owner of London Publishing, died on April 11 after a nine-month battle with pancreatic cancer. The sports publishing pioneer launched many magazines that remain prominent today, including PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, *The Wrestler, Inside Wrestling, KO,* and *World Boxing.*

In 1933, Weston began his career as an errand boy for Nat Fleischer, publisher of *The Ring.* Beginning in 1939, Weston showcased his artistic talents by painting a total of 57 *Ring* covers over a 14-year period. He also worked for Joe Weider, considered a giant in fitness and publishing, in the 1940s.

Weston launched his own venture, *Boxing & Wrestling,* in 1953. It was similar to *The Ring* in that it devoted space to both boxing and wrestling. The success of that magazine led to other publications, such as *Boxing Illustrated* and *Wrestling Revue. The Wrestler* and *Inside Wrestling* were launched in the late-1960s, and *PWI* was born in 1979.

Perhaps the most satisfying event of Weston's career occurred in 1989, when he bought the then-struggling *Ring.* The purchase garnered national media attention, as the venerable "Bible Of Boxing"—established in 1922—was the oldest sports magazine in the United States.

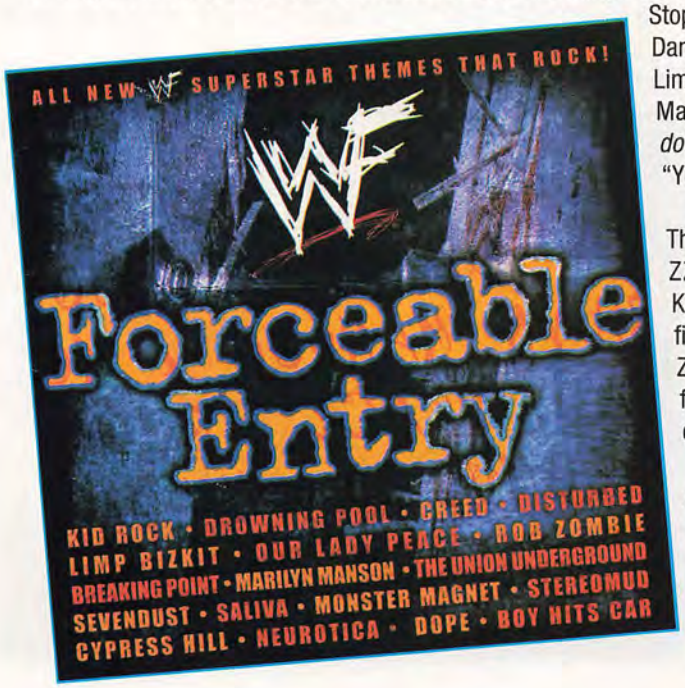
While *The Ring* was closest to his heart, Weston was proud of his accomplishments in wrestling journalism. He enjoyed close relationships with Paul Boesch, Buddy Rogers, and Lou Thesz, among others. In reference to his five-story office building, Weston often said, "Boxing built the top floor. Wrestling built the first four."

He sold London Publishing to its current Pennsylvania-based owners in 1992.

SMACKDOWN RECORDS RELEASES *FORCEABLE ENTRY*

The WWF made another contribution to the genre of "aggro-rock" in early-2002 with the release of *Forceable Entry,* featuring 18 tracks of heart-racing, head-pounding music. The compact disc included some new entrance themes, remixes of old ones, and the new themes for *Raw* and *Smackdown.*

Among the more praised entrance themes were Drowning Pool's "The Game" (Triple-H), Rob Zombie's "Never Gonna Stop" (Edge), Breaking Point's "One Of A Kind" (Rob Van Dam), Saliva's "Turn The Tables" (The Dudley Boyz), and Limp Bizkit's "Rollin'" (The Undertaker). Marilyn Manson's "The Beautiful People" *(Smackdown's* theme) and Creed's new release, "Young Grow Old," were also noteworthy.


ALL NEW WF SUPERSTAR THEMES THAT ROCK!
WF
Forceable Entry
KID ROCK • DROWNING POOL • CREED • DISTURBED
LIMP BIZKIT • OUR LADY PEACE • ROB ZOMBIE
BREAKING POINT • MARILYN MANSON • THE UNION UNDERGROUND
SEVENDUST • SALIVA • MONSTER MAGNET • STEREOMUD
CYPRESS HILL • NEUROTICA • DOPE • BOY HITS CAR

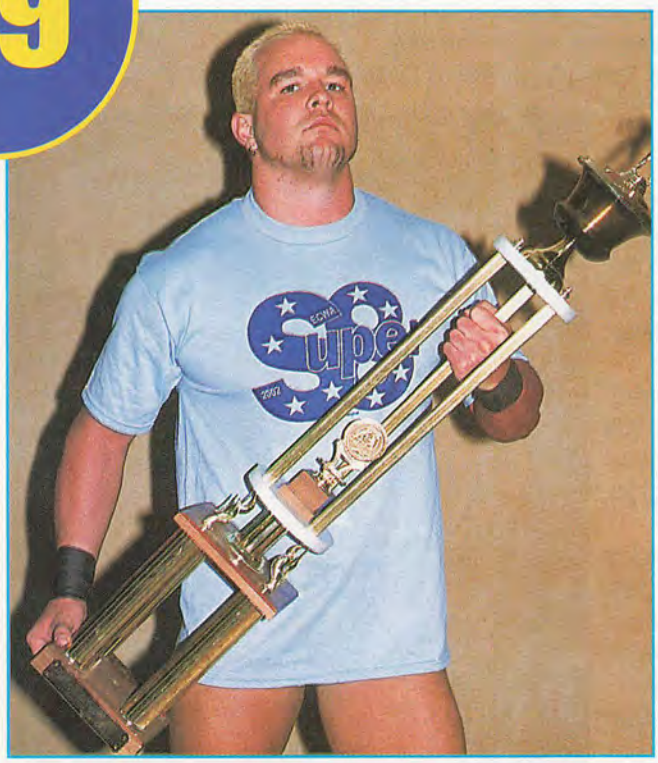
What was the most popular track? That was probably Kid Rock's version of ZZ Top's classic "Legs" for Stacy Keibler. And why not? It's very hard to find someone who isn't a fan of Kid Rock or ZZ Top or Stacy Keibler. And, for most rock fans, having a song that combines the three is truly cool.

More obnoxious tracks were the Union Underground's "Across The Nation" *(Raw's* theme), Stereomud's "End Of Everything" (Raven's theme)—complete with incessant caw-cawing—Boy Hits Car's "Lovefurypassionenergy" (Lita's theme), and Cypress Hill's overcomplicated "Just Another Victim" (Tazz' theme).

29

DONOVAN MORGAN WINS SUPER 8

Pro Wrestling NOAH star Donovan Morgan traveled halfway around the world to Wilmington, Delaware, where he defeated NWA Wildside champion A.J. Styles in the final of the 2002 Super 8. St. Matthew's Parish Hall was packed to capacity for the March 2 show, which included seven tournament matches and two non-tournament bouts.



In opening round bouts, Red pinned Bobby Rude, Morgan pulverized Pepper Parks, Jamie Knoble beat Matt Stryker, and Styles pinned Xavier. Styles defeated Red, and Morgan pinned Knoble, in the semifinals.

Morgan used his innovative defensive skills to block Styles' impressive offense in the final. Morgan turned Styles' swinging DDT attempt into a Northern Lights suplex. He turned Styles' scorpion deathdrop into his own swinging neckbreaker. But the Wildside champ possessed the most awesome finisher of the show: the Styles clash. With that maneuver, Styles begins what looks like a setup for the pedigree, but he hooks his opponent's arms with his legs before lifting his foe in a piledriver position. That leaves his opponent's face and torso totally exposed as he drops to the canvas. The move is as dangerous as it is complicated, but unlike Xavier and Red, Morgan kicked out of the subsequent pin attempt.

Absorbing the best Styles could muster, Morgan executed his double-underhook piledriver to pin the Wildside champ and win the Super 8 trophy.

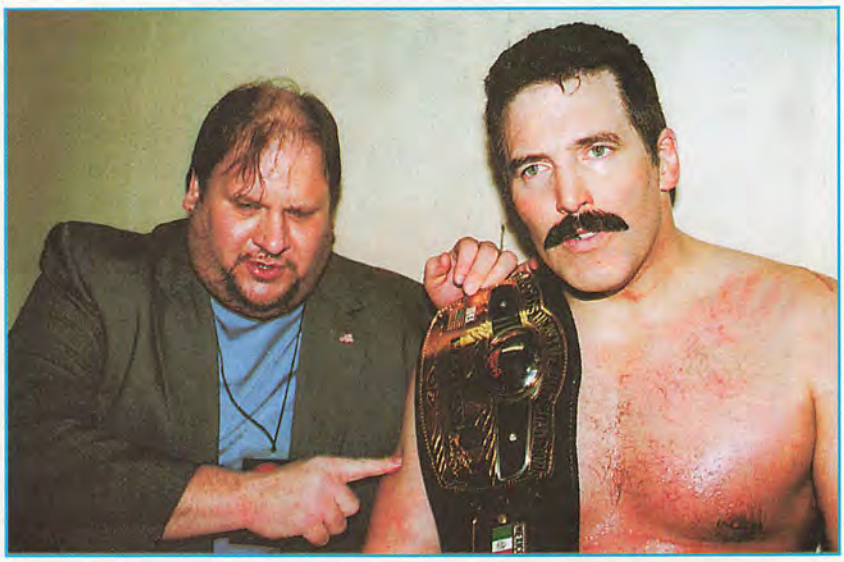
30

NWA STRIPS DAN SEVERN OF HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE

NWA Vice President Bill Behrens stripped Dan Severn of the heavyweight title on May 28 because the champion said he would be unable to appear at the inaugural Total Nonstop Action pay-per-view. Severn had previously agreed to compete in a mixed martial arts event on the same night.

Some fans thought this sounded like a convenient excuse to have a big battle royal for the vacant championship at the TNA pay-per-view. Sources close to the promotion surmised that Severn might have been stripped of the title one way or another, regardless of his schedule.

"Stripping Severn of the title does seem like an arbitrary move," said Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker. "It isn't as if Severn was already committed to the TNA pay-per-view and backed out of the show. He wasn't necessarily going to be in violation of the 30-day rule, either, which I thought was the only grounds of stripping a champion of the title."



Controversy had marred Severn's title reign since NWA President Jim Miller (pictured with Severn) helped "The Beast" win the title from Shinya Hashimoto on March 19 in Tokyo. Severn's two-month stint was a far cry from his first title reign that lasted four years.

31

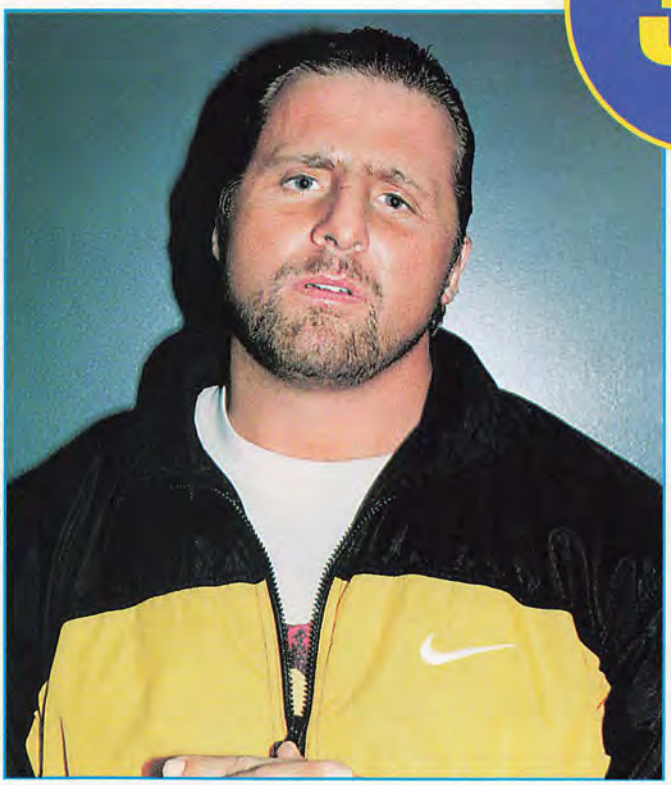
ARTISAN ENTERTAINMENT SIGNS DEAL FOR OWEN HART FILM

Martha Hart, widow of Owen Hart, sold Artisan Entertainment exclusive rights to produce a movie based on her husband's life. Best known for producing *The Blair Witch Project,* the film company was to begin shooting in the spring of 2002 and finish by the end of 2003. The release is scheduled for mid-2004.

The movie is expected to focus on Hart's famous wrestling family, his relationship with Martha and his children, and his death at the WWF's Over the Edge pay-per-view in May 1999. All proceeds will be donated to the Owen Hart Foundation, a charity Martha established in memory of her husband.

"There's a lot of mystery behind what really happened [to Owen], and the story has never been told properly," Martha said in an interview with the *Calgary Sun.* "I want to try to focus on the good that's come out of Owen's death." Martha will discuss the work of the Owen Hart Foundation in a vignette at the end of the movie.

Martha is collaborating with *Calgary Sun* sportswriter Eric Francis to write a book about her husband that is scheduled for release in the fall of 2003.



32

WRESTLING RETURNS TO WMC-TV IN MEMPHIS

No longer do Memphis wrestling fans have to sit through boring infomercials or remain satisfied with occasional broadcasts of *The Best Of Memphis Championship Wrestling.* The latest incarnation of wrestling on WMC-TV is simply titled *Championship Wrestling.*

The taped program features many Memphis favorites, including Jerry Lawler, Brian Christopher, Bill Dundee, Bart Sawyer, Seven, Brother Ernest, Ashley Hudson, Nate the Rat, and host Cory Macklin. WWE announcers Michael Cole and Jonathan Coachman have added some freshness through various segments.

The resumption of WMC wrestling meant a return to some old-school storylines. Jamie Dundee, for example, is incarcerated in a Memphis jail and wrestles only when he's on work release! Dundee doesn't hesitate to clock opponents with his pair of stolen handcuffs. Obviously, his parole officer doesn't watch *Championship Wrestling.*

In 2001, WMC canceled Power Pro Wrestling due to insurance liability issues and overall financial concerns, ending 34 years of live Saturday morning wrestling. The old Mid-Southern territory, the Championship Wrestling Association, the United States Wrestling Association, and Power Pro are among the incarnations of Memphis wrestling through the decades.

33

FORMER NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION NELSON ROYAL DIES

Nelson Royal, a main-eventer for Jim Crockett Promotions in the 1960s and early-1970s, died of a massive heart attack on February 3 in his hometown of Mooresville, North Carolina. Royal will be remembered most for holding the NWA junior heavyweight title in the late-1970s.

Royal became an accomplished tag team wrestler in the 1960s as a partner of Paul Jones in Jim Crockett Sr.'s original promotion, All-Star Wrestling. The veteran made a comeback in 1986 by teaming with his protege, Mid-Atlantic champion Sam Houston. In fact, Royal trained many young stars in Jim Crockett Jr.'s World Championship Wrestling. Aside from his Mid-Atlantic exploits, Royal was popular throughout the southeastern United States.

"He was a super guy," former NWA World heavyweight champion Dory Funk Jr. told the *Wrestling Observer*. "He was a terrific worker. By today's standards, he would have been a great worker because he was all action, had timing, and took excellent bumps. He made me think I was terrific. When I wrestled other people, I found out that I wasn't as good as I thought. I wish everybody in the business was like him."

34

DALLAS PAGE SUFFERS CAREER-ENDING INJURIES

Physicians in Atlanta and Birmingham advised "Diamond" Dallas Page to retire. San Antonio's Dr. Lloyd Youngblood, who has performed spinal surgery on superstars such as Steve Austin and Chris Benoit, told Page he could probably wrestle for six more months—if DDP had surgery to fuse his C5, C6, and C7 vertebrae after that time. But Page knew if he took one bad bump, he could end up paralyzed. That made his final decision a relatively easy one.

Page's most recent injuries stemmed from his match against Hardcore Holly on the April 18 edition of *Smackdown*. He spent the next few weeks undergoing tests and receiving various opinions. Page pondered his situation throughout the month of May, weighing his desire to finally make an impact in WWE against the possibility of suffering permanent paralysis.

Dr. Youngblood advised Page to begin exercises to strengthen his neck, which would be necessary to continue his career or, possibly, avoid surgery altogether if he chose to retire.

Page's condition is more severe than that of Austin or Benoit. DDP has three damaged vertebrae and a narrow spinal cord, not just two injured vertebrae, as was true in the cases of Austin and Benoit. At 46 years old, Page would be nearly 15 years older than Austin or Benoit at the time of their surgery and probably wouldn't have much of a career left in his late-40s.

The former WCW World champion finally made his decision in June. He would turn the page and pursue his career in motivational speaking in addition to continuing his relationship with WWE in some capacity.

WWE RELEASES SCOTT HALL AND CURT HENNIG

Why do grown wrestlers act like maladjusted ninth-graders while on international tours? That was a pattern in WCW and seems to becoming one in WWE. Scott Hall and Curt Hennig were released in May due to unprofessional conduct.

Hall's demons got the better of him again, and he spent much of WWE's European tour partying. While Hall was commended for his ring work early upon his return in February, friends noticed he was slipping into some of the same destructive habits that have haunted him throughout his career.

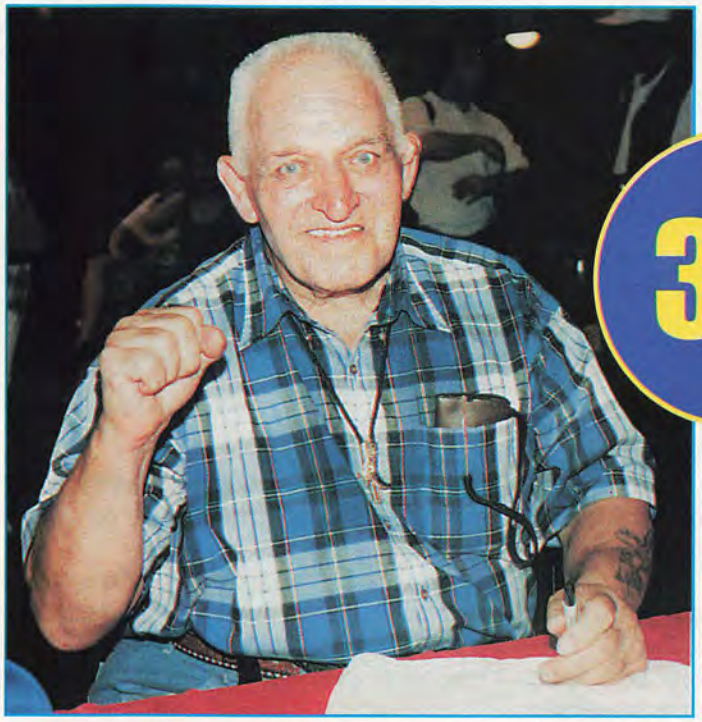
Hennig, on the other hand, might want to join "Ribbers Anonymous." His reputation for playing jokes on other wrestlers is notorious, and his run-in with Brock Lesnar on the return flight from Europe didn't help him one bit. Sources say Hennig boasted that he was a better technical grappler than former NCAA wrestling champion Lesnar, which led to a scuffle between the two men. Apparently, WWE officials considered the veteran's behavior a bad example for younger stars.

Where did these former AWA World tag team champions go wrong?

Jim Ross, the WWE vice president of talent relations, addressed the behavior of a handful of employees during that return flight from Europe on wwe.com: "The flight was about seven hours in length and at times was lowlighted by a handful of people who consumed too much alcohol and consequently acted like children whose parents were away and left the liquor cabinet unlocked."

SWEDE HANSON DIES AT AGE 68

Some of today's fans will remember Swede Hanson as a rugged preliminary wrestler in the WWF during the early-1980s. Others will remember his occasional bouts in the Mid-Atlantic during the same period. A precious few might remember his most important match ever, a shot at WWF World champion Bob Backlund at Madison Square Garden in 1979.

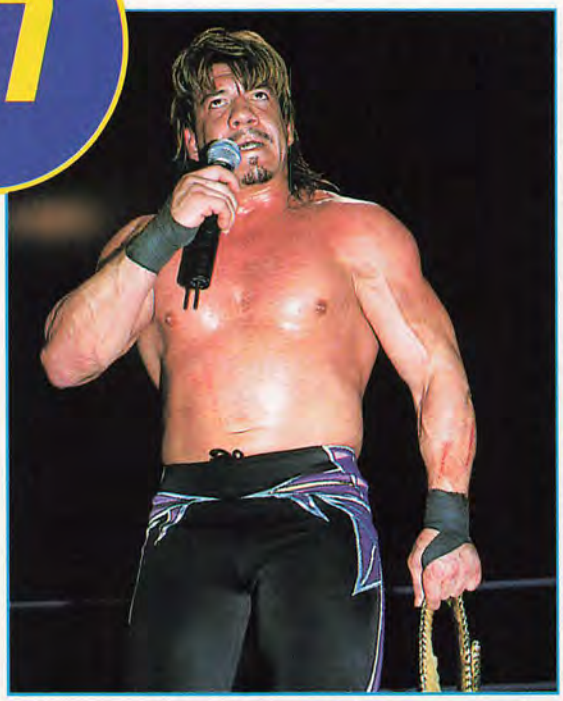


Hanson, with dark circles under his eyes and often wearing a Confederate soldier's cap, had the classic look of a rugged heel. But he had an unexplainable endearing quality that caused early-1980s WWF fans, perhaps sympathizing with his losing streak, to embrace him. His baby-face turn was subtle and wasn't complete until he had an argument with Magnificent Muraco at the Philadelphia Spectrum and, as guest referee of Muraco's match, deliberately cost him the victory.

The most famous resident of Slaughter Creek, North Carolina, won several regional tag team titles with partner Rip "The Profile" Hawk. His finishing maneuver was a standard over-the-knee backbreaker.

Hanson's death on February 19 brought sadness to those fans who loved cheering on the big Swede. He had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease and diabetes for some time.

37 WWE REINSTATES EDDIE GUERRERO



When the WWE fired Eddie Guerrero in November 2001, it looked as if the second-generation superstar's major league career in the U.S. was over. After all, WWE had forced Guerrero to check into a drug rehabilitation facility on June 6 of last year when he displayed erratic behavior backstage.

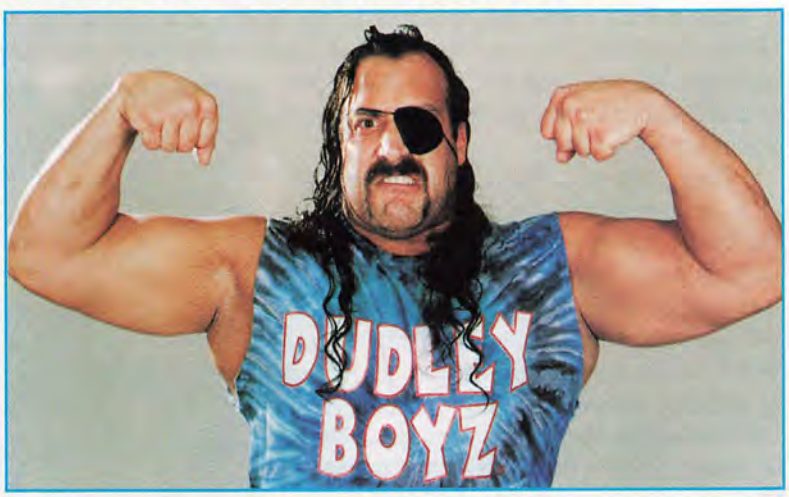
Then Guerrero seemed to have wasted his second chance when he crashed his vehicle into the gate of a Tampa apartment complex and was subsequently arrested for driving under the influence on November 9.

At that point, Guerrero began appearing for several promotions, including Ring of Honor, New Japan, Maryland Championship Wrestling, and New England's World Wrestling Alliance. He won the international cruiserweight title in a three-way match also involving Juventud Guerrera and defending champ Psicosis at the WWA's Revolution pay-per-view. Wrestling under a dimmer spotlight seemed to reinvigorate Guerrero's love for the business and gave him a chance to deal with his substance abuse problems.

WWE officials must have noticed the change. Guerrero made a surprise appearance on *Raw* in which he instigated a feud with Rob Van Dam. In an amazing display of WWE's commitment, "Latino Heat" received an immediate match at Backlash with Van Dam, whom he beat for his second Intercontinental title. More amazingly still, Guerrero defeated RVD again at Judgment Day and was put into a storyline with Steve Austin.

Van Dam finally regained the Intercontinental belt from Guerrero in a scintillating ladder match on *Raw*. It is being hailed as a Match of the Year candidate. Meanwhile, Guerrero is being hailed as one of WWE's top performers.

38 "BIG" DICK DUDLEY FOUND DEAD IN APARTMENT



Former ECW mid-carder "Big' Dick Dudley, whose real name was Alex Rizzo, was found dead in his New York apartment on May 16. He was only 34.

Dudley graduated from Johnny Rodz' training school in 1986, but he didn't reach prominence until he joined fellow Rodz graduates Tommy Dreamer and Tazz in ECW in the mid-1990s. He was part of the Dudley entourage, which included Buh Buh Ray, D-Von, and Sign Guy Dudley (Lou E. Dangerously). Dudley didn't wrestle that often, instead adopting the role of strong-arm enforcer. He was particularly good at throwing little Spike Dudley long distances.

Dudley later left ECW and joined Xtreme Pro Wrestling in California. XPW's product was every bit as risque as ECW's, if not more so. XPW wrestlers had great respect for Dudley because he had become a national star based on his exploits in hardcore wrestling, a style in which they were trying to excel.

Unfortunately, a motorcycle accident nearly killed Dudley in 2001, putting at least a temporary end to his XPW appearances and, perhaps, an end to his career forever. He suffered a broken neck in that accident and was prescribed various painkillers for his recovery.

The 6'3", 285-pound Dudley's physical health deteriorated, with some reports that he had lost at least 70 pounds by the time of his death. Another automobile accident aggravated his injuries, especially his neck. Preliminary reports suggest he died of kidney or liver failure.

BRET HART REJECTS OFFER TO APPEAR AT WRESTLEMANIA X8

Hulk Hogan's return sparked a nostalgic reflection upon past world champions, and that factor no doubt prompted Federation officials to contact one man who is noticeably absent from the scene: Bret Hart, perhaps the preeminent WWF superstar of the mid-1990s. The "Hitman" was offered a chance to referee the WrestleMania X8 main event between World champion Chris Jericho and Triple-H.

Officials sweetened the deal by giving Hart a chance to kayo Vince McMahon in front of thousands of his Canadian fans.

"In that one phony punch, everything that's happened would be minimized into an angle," Hart said in his weekly "Sharpshooter" column in the *Calgary Sun*. "Maybe wrestling fans would love it. My fans would hate it. And so would I.

"Thanks, but no thanks."

Hart's bad feelings toward WWE stem from the Survivor Series double-cross in 1997, when McMahon screwed the "Hitman" out of the World title in favor of Shawn Michaels. Hart wanted to forfeit the belt on *Raw* before he jumped to WCW. McMahon didn't want to take that chance. Also, Bret believed the company was culpable in the death of his brother Owen at 1999's Over the Edge pay-per-view.

The former WWF and WCW world champion did indicate that he would attempt to resolve these issues if McMahon were willing to have an honest discussion with him.

TOUGH ENOUGH 2 ANNOUNCES WINNERS

The wrestlers, trainees, and fans assembled at The World (formerly WWF New York) nightclub in New York for the live announcement of *Tough Enough 2's* winners were shocked when Stacy Keibler announced not only one female winner, but *two* female winners. In fact, Jackie Gayda cried when Keibler announced Linda Miles' name because she naturally assumed the next winner would be a man.

The announcements were humiliating for the male competitors because they were being told, essentially, that neither one of them was ready for a WWE career.

Among those who made the decision were trainers Al Snow, Ivory, Hardcore Holly, and Chavo Guerrero Jr., along with "Big" John Gaburick. Most former contestants, including *Tough Enough 1* female winner Nidia, Chris Nowinski, and Josh Matthews were in attendance.

Immediately following the announcement, Snow addressed the controversy on wwe.com: "I don't think Jackie or Linda expected that two women were going to win. I know Jake and Kenny were definitely surprised. We go with what we see. In the future, Kenny and Jake can pursue this. Just because it wasn't their time tonight doesn't mean it will never be their time."

Snow added that he thought *Tough Enough 3* should be restricted to training midgets only.

41 EDGE BEATS KURT ANGLE IN HAIR VS. HAIR MATCH

Which would disappear at Judgment Day? Edge's golden locks? Or Kurt Angle's already receding crop of hair? The fact that this hair vs. hair match provided a tangible consequence for losing made Edge vs. Angle a must-see encounter. Anticipation remained high, despite WWE's overzealous production team, which insisted on showing computer simulations of how Edge and Angle would appear bald *before* the pay-per-view.

Angle, who actually made the challenge, hammered Edge against the ropes at the outset. Eventually, Edge knocked Angle out of the ring and followed through with a baseball slide. But it was Angle who executed the first maneuver for the highlight reel—a belly-to-belly suplex that sent Edge reeling to the outside.

Later, Edge blundered when he accidentally speared the referee. Edge recovered from an Angle suplex to hit the Olympian with another spear. Angle blocked another spear, but fell victim to a third. He amazed the Nashville crowd by kicking out just before the dazed referee could count to three.

Near the end, Angle blocked an Edge-a-cutioner attempt and surprised the Toronto native with a spear of his own. The former world champion executed the Angle slam, but Edge kicked out. Angle went for his submission finisher, the anklelock. Despite the agony, Edge managed to turn the anklelock into a pin attempt and a three-count.

The Olympian refused his date with the barber's chair and, after another altercation, ran backstage. Edge found Angle later in the pay-per-view, put him in a sleeperhold, and shaved him bald. He slapped Angle back to consciousness and held a mirror to his face. Angle cried in horror at the sight.

42 FMW GOES BANKRUPT; OWNER COMMITS SUICIDE

The story of Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling continued to be a tragic one in 2002. Following Hayabusa's spinal injury and paralysis last year, the Tokyo-based company ceased operations and filed for bankruptcy in February.

FMW went into business 12 years ago and was a forerunner to ECW. Featuring bouts with such billings as "spider web broken glass barbed wire exploding cage double-hell death" matches, FMW produced a bloody, extreme style that is unmatched in wrestling history.

Atsushi Onita (pictured) was the promotion's greatest star, and even toured ECW on occasion, as did the tag team of Gedo and Jado. Sabu, Mike Awesome (then known as The Gladiator), and Masato Tanaka rose to prominence in FMW, and all of them captured the ECW title. Terry Funk and Mick Foley headlined a number of FMW shows as well.

When Onita left the company, Kodo Fuyuki took control and embraced sports entertainment over extreme warfare. This was a poor business decision, as FMW hit hard financial times beginning in early-2001.

Fuyuki was diagnosed with intestinal cancer earlier this year and continued to wrestle until surgery became absolutely necessary. NOAH's Mitsuharu Misawa organized a retirement show for Fuyuki, and teamed with him and Yoshinari Ogawa to defeat Masao Inoue, Tsuyoshi Kikuchi, and Akira Taue.

Making a terrible situation much worse was the news of the suicide of FMW owner Shoichi Arai, 36, on May 16. Arai was very deep in debt at the time and apparently distraught over personal problems as well.

43 BROCK LESNAR DEBUTS ON WWE TV

Vince McMahon had long wanted to recruit a wrestler with the Goldberg mystique, only with excellent technical skills. McMahon realized that goal when WWE promoted Brock Lesnar from Ohio Valley Wrestling in March.

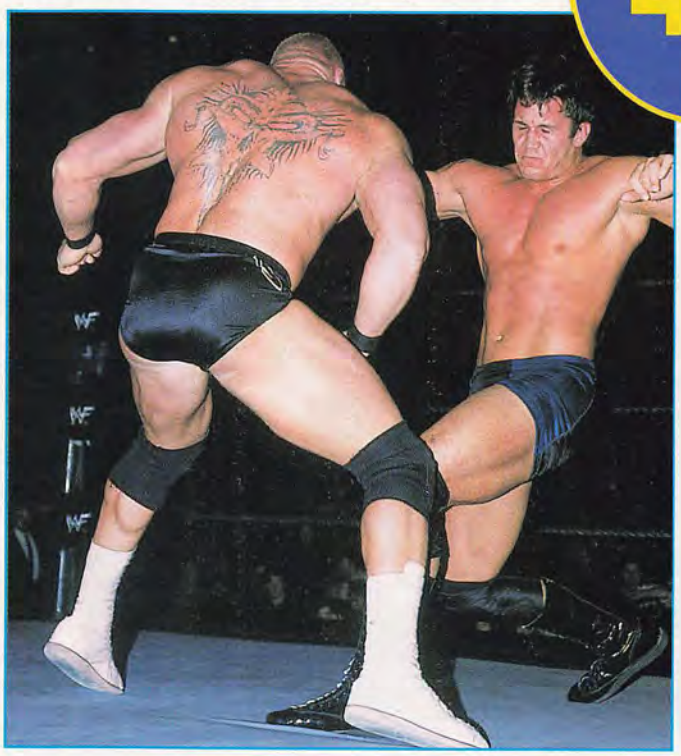
Lesnar had been successful in OVW, capturing the Southern tag team title with partners Brian Keck and Shelton Benjamin. He was also the 2000 NCAA heavyweight champion, so his grappling background is beyond reproach.

And here's something Ohio Valley Wrestling fans have seen that WWE fans have not: The 6'3", 295-pounder can deliver a spectacular shooting star press.

Lesnar's only weakness is his ability to gab. By having Paul Heyman as his agent in WWE, Lesnar now has someone to do all his talking for him … and then some. Lesnar was placed on *Raw* during the brand extension draft on April 1 and has proven to be a destructive monster every Monday night since.

Both Hardy Boyz, Rikishi, Bradshaw, Shawn Stasiak, and Buh Buh Ray Dudley are among Lesnar's victims so far. Lesnar was instrumental in helping Vince McMahon regain 100 percent ownership of WWE when he attacked Ric Flair during the match between the "Nature Boy" and Vinnie Mac on June 10.

In early-June, Lesnar and Rob Van Dam were considered the two best bets to win the 2002 King of the Ring.



44 ROB VAN DAM PINS WILLIAM REGAL FOR INTERCONTINENTAL TITLE

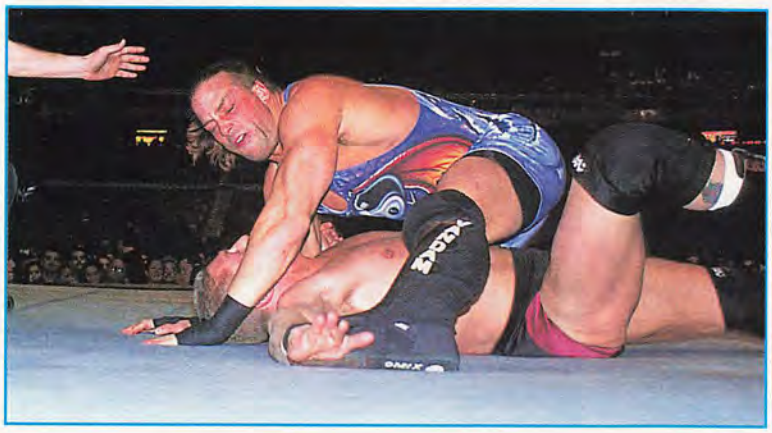
This was the second year William Regal found himself in the opening match of WrestleMania. This was the second year he defended the Intercontinental title.

And yes, this was the second year he lost it.

Rob Van Dam's career had cooled considerably since his handful of main-event matches in the summer and fall of 2001. Van Dam had been the one of the few bright spots of the Alliance storyline and, following that faction's demise at Survivor Series, "The Whole Damn Show" became "The Whole Damn Mid-Card Show."

At WrestleMania X8, Van Dam showed why he was worthy of the Intercontinental title. RVD also showed that he deserved better than the opener.

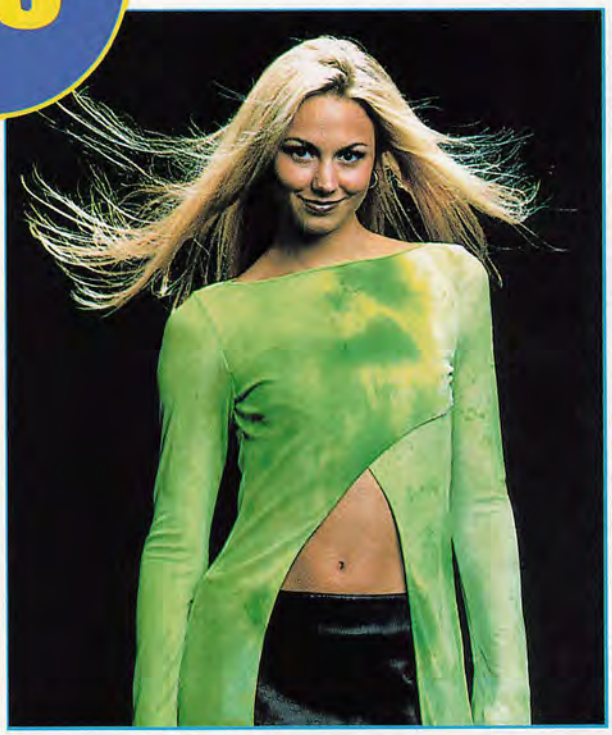
Van Dam did make the mistake of trying to pin William Regal too early. He missed both a five-star frog splash and a rolling thunder sequence within the first few minutes of the match. Van Dam had rattled Regal enough to take the advantage, but hadn't exhausted him enough to be attempting finishers that soon.



Regal's only bit of major offense was a scary half-nelson German suplex, which planted Van Dam on top of his head. If the champion had spent less time preoccupied by his two sets of brass knuckles, he might have developed a more effective ring strategy.

In the end, Van Dam nailed Regal with a spinning heel kick and came down with a frighteningly high frog splash. He defeated Regal in only 6:18.

45 KEIBLER NAMED WRESTLING'S MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN



Stacy Keibler was voted the most beautiful woman in wrestling history in 2002. That's a bold accolade, one that gives Keibler some awesome bragging rights in the WWE dressing room. *PWI* provided ballots for the contest in the Fall 2001 issue of *PWI Presents: Women Of Wrestling.* Readers were given the heavy responsibility of ranking all 100 women, instead of voting simply for one person.

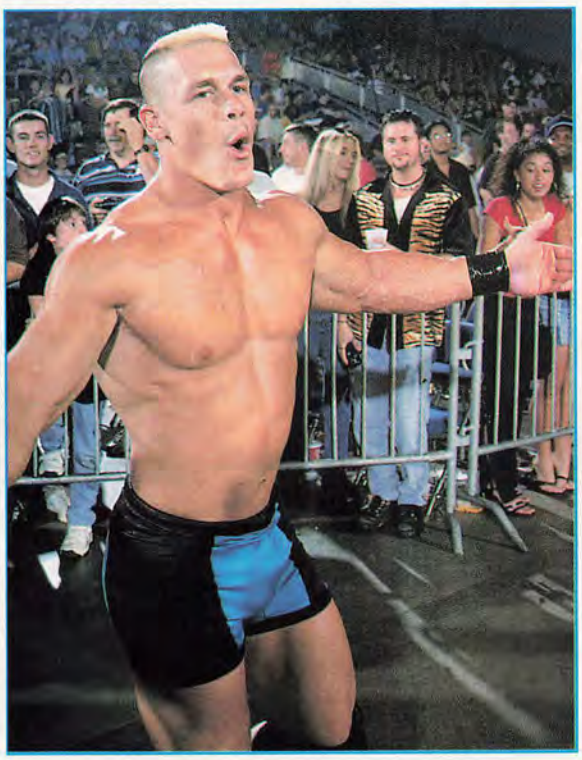
One year later, the Fall 2002 issue declared Keibler the winner. The other top 10 vote-getters, in order, were as follows: Lita, Trish Stratus, Kimberly Page, Missy Hyatt, Stephanie McMahon, Tammy Sytch, Torrie Wilson, Sable, and Woman. Just for the record, the scary but talented Akira Hokuto placed 100th.

Readers were warned not to allow the popularity of current divas to influence their decisions, so women from yesteryear would in theory have a fair shot. Also, readers were told to not allow the placement of Keibler on the original issue's cover to influence them. But there's little doubt that wrestling's most sought-after demographic, 18- to 24-year-olds, was responsible for the selection of Keibler, who happened to be one of the youngest divas in the balloting.

Said Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker: "Stacy is a heel, yet she doesn't go out of her way to antagonize the fans. Stacy is what you would call a 'tweener.' She's not too good and she's not too bad … she's just right."

46 PROTOTYPE DEFEATS LEVIATHAN FOR OHIO VALLEY BELT

When Prototype arrived in OVW, he was occasionally derided as just another musclehead. He seemed like another Sting clone churned out by Rick Bassman's training school in California. But Prototype silenced his critics by embarking on a lengthy undefeated streak in OVW … until he lost in a stunning upset to David Flair.



Prototype had to recover quickly or risk being put in the same category as other failed strongmen such as Brakkus, The Warlord, and Zeus. One week later, on February 20, Prototype managed to follow his worst defeat with his greatest victory. He defeated Leviathan for the Ohio Valley title in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

That was quite a boost for Prototype's career, considering WWE had just promoted Leviathan to assume the role of Deacon Bautista, Rev. D-Von's assistant on *Smackdown.* Many viewed that title change as handing the torch to Prototype, who would probably become Ohio Valley's biggest star and the next developmental wrestler to receive the callup to WWE. The victory also helped the 6'3", 260-pounder crack *PWI's* Top 10 for the first time.

"Everyone likes to compare him to a young Sting, but he doesn't go for the face paint and screaming and playing to the fans," said OVW promoter Jim Cornette. "He makes no bones about looking out for himself, and that's not necessarily a bad thing."

Many insiders expect the 23-year-old star, who has wrestled at numerous WWE house shows, to be in WWE full-time by the end of the year, probably at the upper mid-card level.

WWE WOMEN'S DIVISION PLAGUED BY INJURIES

Two of WWE's most prominent female wrestlers suffered serious injuries, affecting not only the *Raw* roster, but the entire women's division. Lita was the first casualty, yet her injury didn't occur in the ring. She broke her neck in three places while performing a stunt during the filming of the Fox television series *Dark Angel*. Dr. Lloyd Youngblood performed surgery on Lita and told her that a return would be a full year in the future.

WWE women's champion Jazz was the next to go down. Jazz suffered problems with her left knee, which she had injured during a high school basketball game several years ago. Apparently Jazz blew out her knee in a tag team match with Molly Holly against Trish Stratus and Jacquelyn in London. When Jazz returned to the U.S., an MRI revealed a complete tear in her ACL. On May 13, Jazz braced her knee for one last match in Toronto, in which she lost the women's title to hometown girl Trish Stratus. She is expected to be out of action for most of the rest of 2002.

"These injuries came at an inopportune time because WWE was finally putting some muscle behind the women's division," said *PWI's* WWE analyst, Thomas Pilliard. "Jazz was proving to be as dominant a champion as Chyna, and Lita was taking her focus off the Hardys and putting it back on her career. Also, the women's title was being treated, in theory at least, as being on par with the World heavyweight belt.

"The burden is now on Trish Stratus, who has already done so much in a short amount of time, and Molly Holly, who's been ready for a push for quite a while."

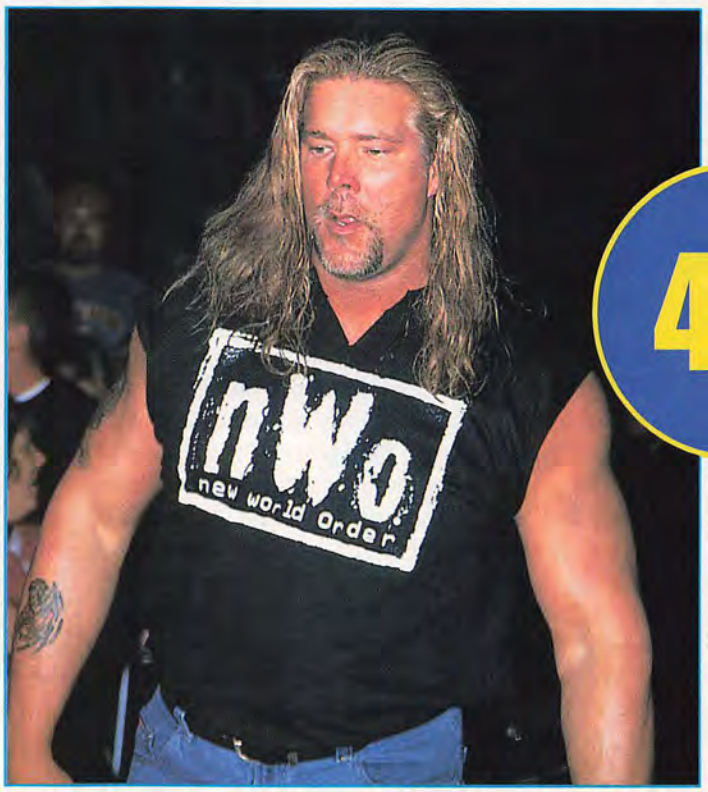
KEVIN NASH SUES AOL TIME WARNER

So what did Kevin Nash do with all those fat paychecks he received from AOL Time Warner? He took at least some of the money and hired a team of lawyers to sue the Universal Wrestling Corporation, the legal entity that administered WCW's affairs following the WWF's purchase.

Nash claimed he was owed compensation for creative contributions to his "Big Sexy" character and devising specific themes and routines for The Outsiders, the New World Order, and NWO Wolfpac. He also said there were outstanding royalties for use of his name, image, and persona.

An article published in the *Fulton County Daily Report* noted that at least one of Nash's lawyers was preparing suits on behalf of other wrestlers. Nash's complaint alleged that WCW "engaged in a systematic pattern and practice designed to avoid paying professional wrestlers millions of dollars in royalties."

This adversely affected the income of many stars, whose contracts had granted a percentage of merchandising and licensing revenues, along with compensation for intellectual property. Nash's legal team said WCW refused to provide records to determine accurate revenue percentages.



49 JERRY SPRINGER SECURITY CHIEF MAKES WRESTLING DEBUT IN MCW

The Maryland Championship Wrestling event in Glen Burnie, Maryland, could have been mistaken for a taping of *The Jerry Springer Show*, as chants of "Steve! Steve! Steve!" reverberated throughout Michael's Eighth Avenue. A record crowd of 1,627 fans was on hand to see Steve Wilkos, the bald-headed security chief from the Springer show, make his wrestling debut.

But Wilkos' match wasn't set until Chad Bowman and Dino Divine interrupted Gillberg during an interview, stating they didn't have any opponents for that night. Bowman and Divine told Gillberg they would "just have to beat him up instead."

As on *The Jerry Springer Show,* Wilkos arrived to break up the fight. The 6'3", 220-pounder volunteered to team with Gillberg against Bowman and Divine later in the show.

Bowman and Divine double-teamed Gillberg for most of the main event until the former WWF light heavyweight champion tagged Wilkos, who dazed the two heels with forearm shots and clotheslines. Gillberg recovered quickly and helped Wilkos triumph over Bowman and Divine with double-sleeperholds.

"It was a blast," Wilkos said in an interview with the Associated Press. "I've never done anything like this before. I really enjoyed it."

And how does pro wrestling compare to *The Jerry Springer Show?* "What was exciting for me was to be able to use some force, which I can't do on our show," replied the 38-year-old former Chicago police officer. "I got to show some aggression for once."

50 RING OF HONOR BEGINS PROMOTING IN PHILADELPHIA

For a city known in recent years for hardcore wrestling, Philadelphia seemed like a strange place to launch a promotion that emphasizes the sweet science. Nevertheless, Ring of Honor made its debut in front an enthusiastic sellout crowd of about 400 in the cozy confines of the Murphy Rec Center, located just a few blocks from the old ECW Arena. At that show, Super Crazy beat Eddie Guerrero to become the ROH Intercontinental champion, and Low-Ki won a three-way match also involving American Dragon and Christopher Daniels.

"I think we're seeing a new trend in wrestling, away from hardcore and toward real athletic wrestling," said Low-Ki, who also won the 2001 Super 8. "And just because we're basically scientific, people shouldn't think this is some throwback to the 1950s or '60s, where the whole front row is about to go to sleep. There are more death-defying acts at a Ring of Honor card than any hardcore or garbage wrestling show."

At the second Ring of Honor event (shows are held monthly in Philadelphia), ring announcer Stephen DeAngelis announced the promotion's rules. He said there would be no outside interference tolerated, no harming of officials, and no sneak-attacks. Also, grapplers are required to shake hands before and after each match. In essence, this all meant that fans could count on seeing clean finishes to matches.

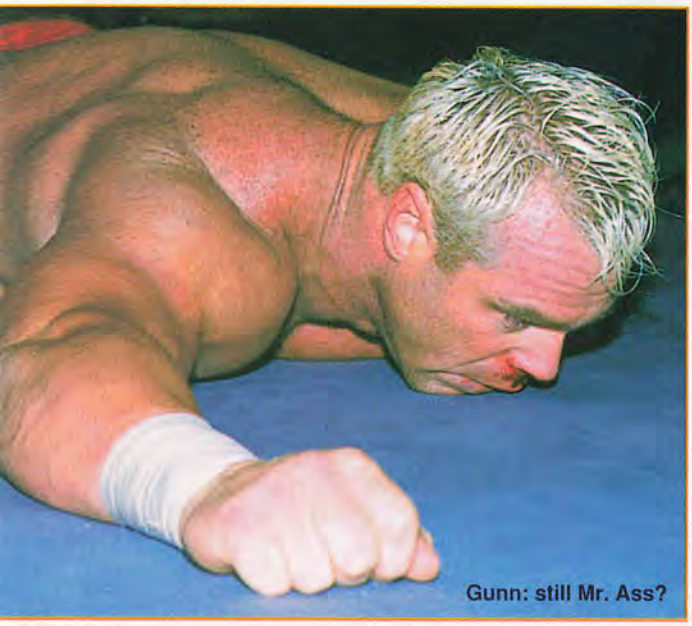
Now *that's* honorable.

THE WACKY & WEIRD

FANS KNOW THAT professional wrestling's biggest draw, the thing that keeps them coming back again and again, is the action that takes place within the confines of the squared circle. Whether it's Rob Van Dam delivering a scintillating five-star frog splash, The Rock dropping a people's elbow on another hapless victim's chest, or Steve Austin bringing a live crowd to its feet by hitting a "Stone-Cold" stunner seemingly out of nowhere, we know that it's the actual wrestling that drives the sport week in and week out.

But tell that to all the mainstream media types who love to point out wrestling's ridiculous side. They aren't interested in what's going on in the ring. They're more interested in the sideshow antics that pervade the industry. And, unfortunately, there are enough sideshow antics in the sport to keep wisecracking cynics fueled with ammunition for years into the future. Want proof? Good, because you're going to get it. Over the next three pages, you'll read about many things that stuck out as peculiar in the world of professional wrestling from this past January through June. Be prepared for the strange and the outlandish, the outrageous and the ridiculous, and the silly and the sublime.

•Geeky Dustin Diamond, who played geeky Screech Powers in the teen sitcom *Saved By The Bell,* started lacing up the boots on the independent circuit. The ring time must have served him well, especially since he looked so strong in his celebrity boxing appearance against Ron Palillo (who played not-so-hunky Horshack on *Welcome Back, Kotter* in the 1970s). But we have to figure that anytime you go from co-starring with Tiffani-Amber Thiessen to working wrestling's indies, you must be experiencing a career downturn.



Gunn: still Mr. Ass?

•Speaking of career downturns, after years of being marketed as one of WWE's hottest young sex symbols, "The One" Billy Gunn became simply Billy and found himself connected to the hip of Chuck Palumbo, who now goes just by Chuck. "Mr. Ass" indeed.

•On a related note, for months, Brock Lesnar and Rico Constantino were touted as two of WWE's hottest developmental prospects by Jim Ross and numerous other insiders. As a former NCAA heavyweight wrestling champion, Lesnar had the stronger credentials, of course, but we wonder what Rico thought when both debuted on TV within weeks of each other, Lesnar as "The Next Big Thing," a human wrecking machine, while Constantino became Rico, stylist to Chuck and Billy. Think Rico offered to trade gimmicks?

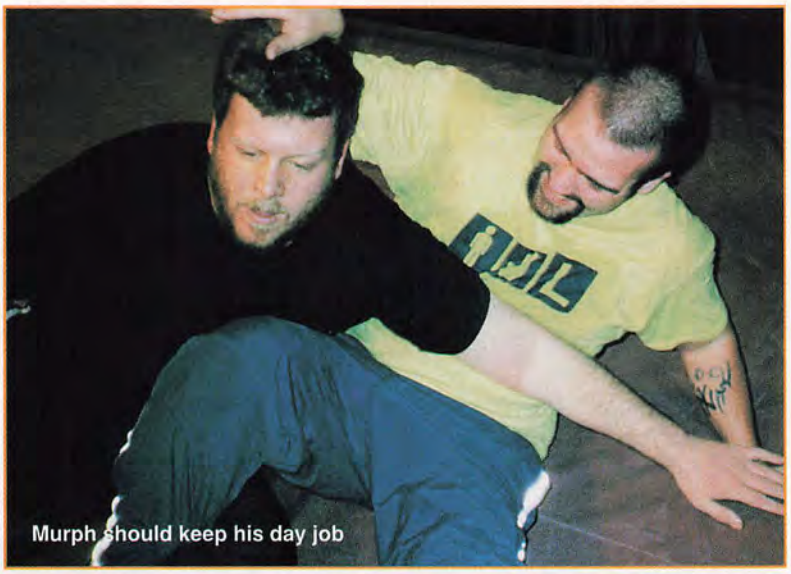
Show's not the greatest spokesman

•We want to give props to The Big Show for dealing with his weight issues: In case you haven't noticed, the guy has slimmed down a bit. But that still doesn't mean he should be a pitchman for Stacker 2. What's next? A return of "Earthquake" John Tenta to WWE just so he can be featured in ads for the fat-burning supplement?

•Booker T's abysmal appearance on *The Weakest Link,* during which he failed to name Columbus Day as the October holiday that celebrates the discovery of America, turned into one of the best appearances of career. First, he got some face time on Howard Stern, and then his segments became hilarious must-see-TV as he tried to prove that he actually has some smarts. Talk about turning a negative into a positive!

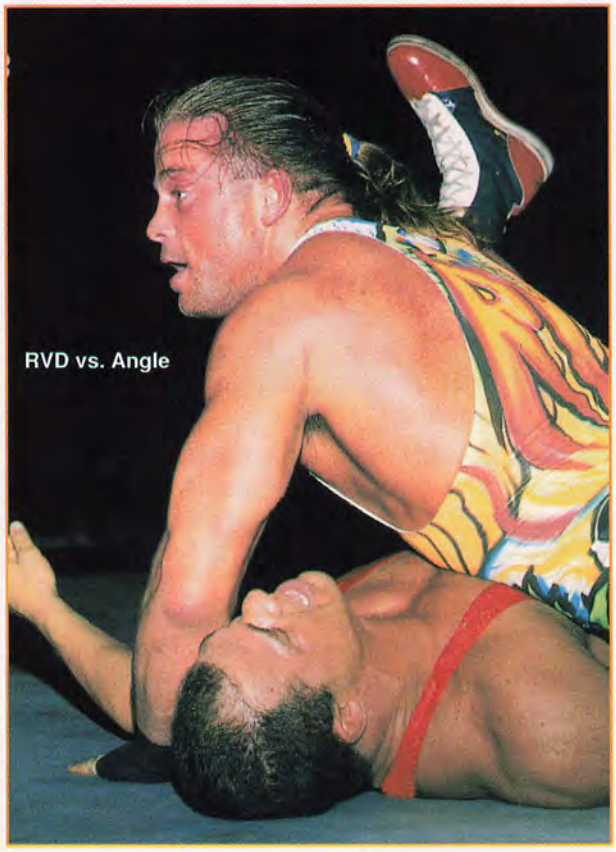
•*PWI* Senior Writer Dan Murphy actually got in the ring against H.C. Loc, best remembered for his stint as ECW's "Extreme Official." The Murph had his tail handed to him during the training session, but he survived. We expected nothing less.

•On the night he returned from a suspension imposed by the Lucha Commission for brawling in the crowd in his native Mexico, La Parka, the former chairman of WCW, decked a fan in plain view of the commissioner. Not exactly bright thinking on his part.


Murph should keep his day job

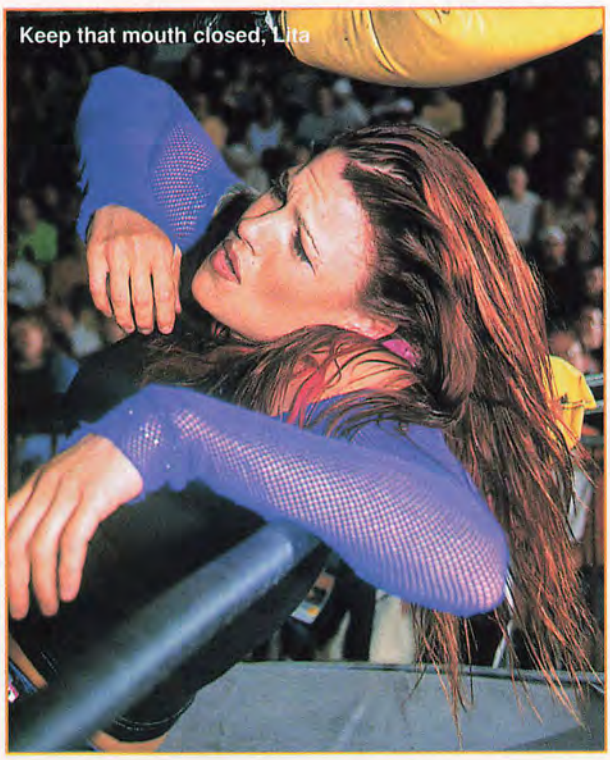
•The second-to-last episode of *Tough Enough 2* was one of the most dramatic of the season. It was the episode on which the final cuts were to be made—to narrow the group of participants down to a final four. The tension built as the show progressed. So what does MTV do to kill the drama? It airs a commercial hyping the *Tough Enough* finale (to be aired live the following week) that shows the final four! *Oops!*

•After Rob Van Dam caught Kurt Angle with a few stiff shots and bloodied him in a couple of matches, Angle's wife, Karen, posted a note on Kurt's Web site basically saying that RVD needs to improve and be more careful. Can you imagine anything more humbling than being taken to task by the wife of one of your co-workers? We know we can't.


RVD vs. Angle

•Weeks before the World Wrestling All-Stars February pay-per-view, Revolution, it was widely reported that Randy Savage was slowly becoming promoter Andrew McManus' right-hand man. So what happened? At the last minute, Savage pulled himself off the pay-per-view, leaving McManus in one heck of a lurch and in need of a more dependable right hand.

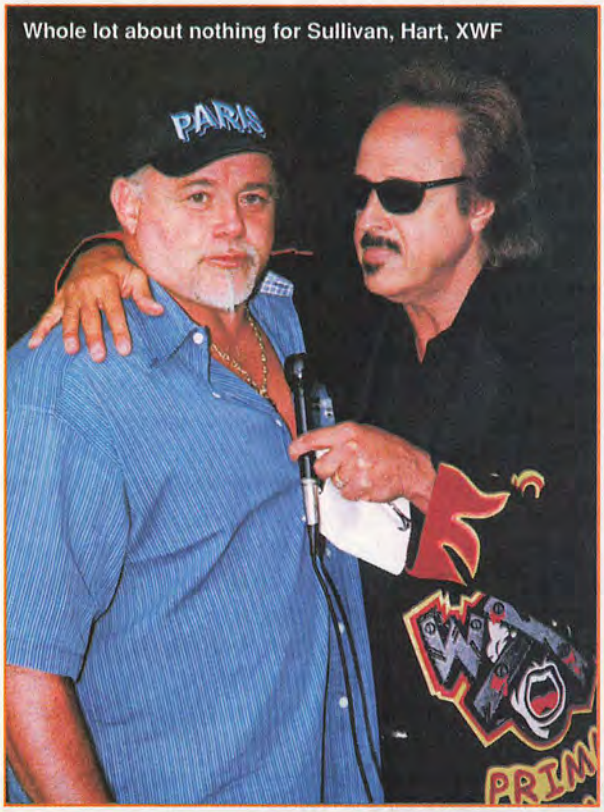
•A lot of men like a little rebelliousness in their women, but this might be going too far. While appearing on a


Keep that mouth closed, Lita

United Kingdom TV show, Lita revealed that she has the word "punk" tattooed on her inner lip. Her inner lip? And we all thought that shoulder tattoo needed fixing! *Ewwwwww!*

•After refusing to work an extended program with Chris Jericho while both were in WCW and putting the bad mouth on the WWF in numerous interviews, Bill Goldberg ran an angle with then-undisputed WWF World heavyweight champion Jericho during a celebrity hockey game. Can you say "hypocrite"?

•Reports out of the X Wrestling Federation cited numerous power struggles within the organization throughout the first half of the year. If there were such struggles, we want to know what the heck they were over. To be the person who can announce to the media the group's next deadline for a TV deal?



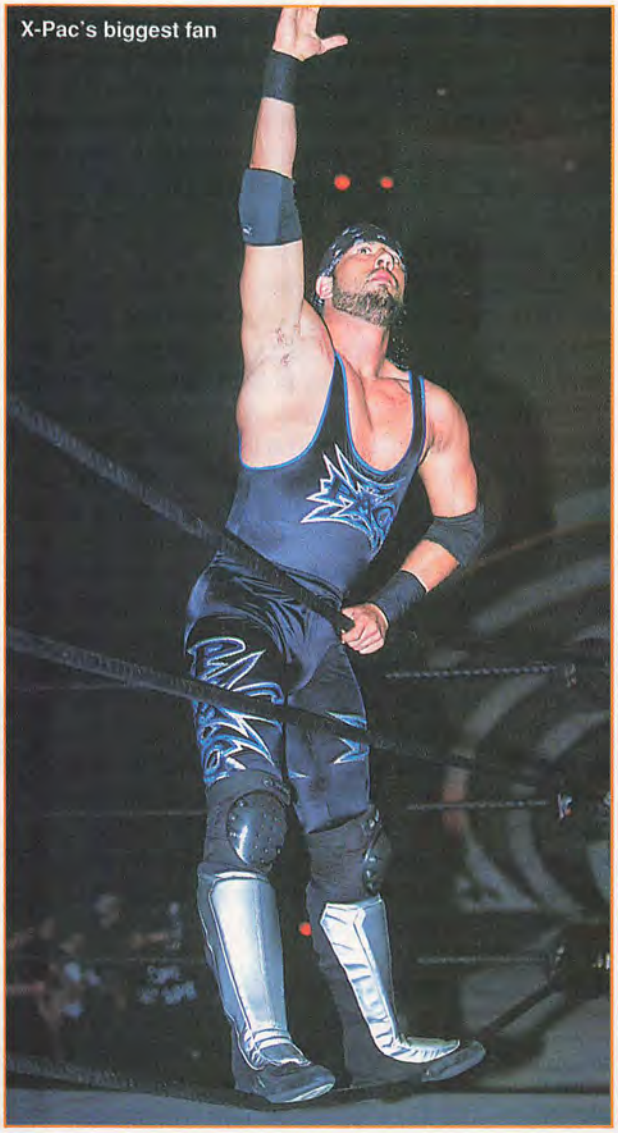
Whole lot about nothing for Sullivan, Hart, XWF

•Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura must be rubbing off on his fellow Minnesota politicians. During a debate on the floor of the Minnesota House of Representatives, House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty challenged his opposition by saying, "As Rock said on WWF TV the other night, don't sing it. Bring it!"

•On *The Late, Late Show With Craig Kilborn,* Stacy Keibler said that friends of her family were calling her parents and congratulating them on Stacy's Vince Russo-scripted pregnancy that took place during WCW's final year under Time Warner. Maybe it's time that Stacy and her parents start smartening up friends, neighbors, and family.

•X-Pac's biggest fan is, well, X-Pac. In an interview with wwe.com, X-Pac answered his critics, many of whom labeled him unworthy of his spot in the high-profile New World Order. "I've read where some people say I jumped over the entire talent roster into a top spot. That's a crock, too. I've been in this business 15 years. I've been a main-event guy and I was kind of damaged goods for a while, but I took six months off and I'm back, and that's all there is to it. I'm putting my money where my mouth is. A lot of guys think they know what they're doing, and the fact of the matter is they don't really. They don't know how to draw money. And until they get there, they need to shut up."

•Hulk Hogan, apparently not rich enough yet, tried to auction off one of his boats from *Thunder In Paradise* for $125,000. We're sure it's a nice boat, but $125,000? What does it do, almost capsize before making a Superman comeback? □


X-Pac's biggest fan

TOP 10 RAW/SMACKDOWN

Raw

10. One funny line. When flamboyant Goldust approached Booker T during the April 15 *Raw* and said that the pair could be the greatest combo since Danny Glover and Mel Gibson teamed up in the *Lethal Weapon* movies, we thought it was pretty funny. Then Booker responded with, "I'm too old for this [expletive]," and we couldn't stop laughing for what seemed like days.

9. Frog splash, Guerrero-style. Rob Van Dam has used the five-star frog splash as long as we can remember, but he wasn't the first to use it in WWE. That honor belongs to Eddie Guerrero. On April 1, Guerrero, who had been away from WWE since being fired late last year, sneak-attacked RVD and hit him with his frog splash, starting a must-see feud.

8. Two April fools. The April 1 *Raw* was the official start to the brand extension era, but things weren't completely settled even then. Steve Austin was a free agent, and Ric Flair and Vince McMahon both coveted him for their respective rosters. Austin teased signing with McMahon but instead gave him a stunner. When Flair started celebrating "Stone-Cold's" decision a little too wildly, he, too, received a stunner. But, hey, at least Austin signed with him.

7. Nuptials, WWE-style. When Triple-H returned to the ring, he hardly wanted anything to do with his wife, Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley. Sensing this, Steph tried to win her husband back by claiming she was pregnant and that she wanted them to renew their wedding vows. Just before the February 4 ceremony, though, Triple-H learned that everything Steph had told him was a lie, and the service broke down into a full-scale brawl, with the bride's father, Vince McMahon, taking a pedigree, and the bride herself almost getting one, too.

6. Sing along with "Stone-Cold." Steve Austin has always had a way with words, but he generally doesn't try to make WWE audiences laugh. Austin usually leaves those promos to The Rock. On January 21, though, Austin had the crowd in the palm of his hand as he did a special "What?!" version of the theme song from *The Beverly Hillbillies.*

5. Familiar territory. During its days in WCW, there wasn't anything that the NWO wouldn't do, no matter how heinous the crime. On February 18, Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Hulk Hogan continued that trend by locking The Rock in an ambulance outside an arena and running it over with a semi-truck. It was so disturbing we couldn't peel our eyes away from it.

4. A plea for mercy. It looks odd in retrospect, but on January 28, with Vince McMahon threatening to bring in the New World Order, WWE co-owner Ric Flair aired a video package of WWE's history to try to convince his partner otherwise. The video featured clips of nearly every important wrestler in the company's history and left many fans (and reporters) emotional.

3. The return. On January 7 at Madison Square Garden, Triple-H returned to TV following a near-eight-month absence. The fans stood screaming and applauding for minutes on end—and that was before he even made it to the ring. Once there, Triple-H got down to business: "Just in case you forgot, let me tell you just who the hell I am. I am 'The Game,' and you can bet your ass I'm back!"

2. Big things ahead. It might not have been WWE's most entertaining segment in its history, but it was definitely one of its most important. When Linda McMahon announced that the company's board of directors had decided to split the promotion in half and give Ric Flair control of *Raw* and Vince McMahon *Smackdown,* it marked the beginning of WWE's riskiest initiative ever. The brand extension was underway.

1. Icons. The Rock and Hulk Hogan are two of wrestling's biggest stars ever. When they stood nose-to-nose in the middle of the ring on February 18 (and later came to blows), it was an historic moment and one that won't be soon forgotten. It wasn't just one of *Raw's* top 10 moments of the half-year, it was one of wrestling's top 10 moments of all-time. □

MOMENTS OF THE HALF-YEAR

Smackdown

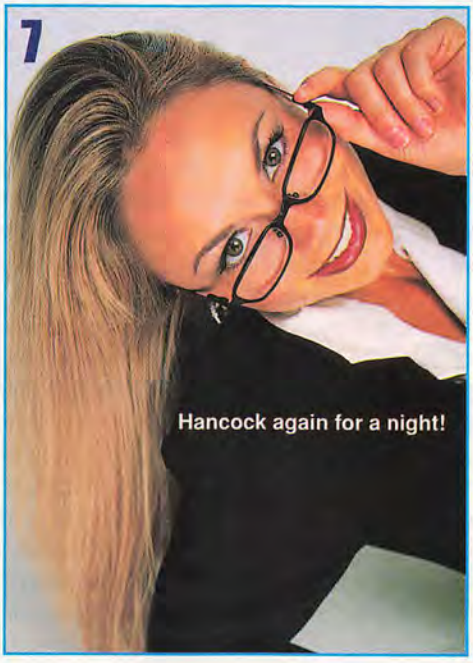
Rough *Raw* moment for Hall

10. No more kimono. We never really understood what the heck Torrie Wilson saw in Tajiri. We were even more curious about the relationship after Tajiri started forcing her to dress in a not-so-sexy kimono. On May 7, it looked like Wilson had finally had enough. She climbed onto the announcers' table during her man's match and stripped the kimono off, revealing some fabulous lingerie. At least we understood what he saw in her.

9. Hall "incarcerated" again. On the February 19 *Smackdown,* Steve Austin locked Hall in a makeshift cell backstage. When Kevin Nash and Hulk Hogan went to look for him, Austin attacked, pulling Hall out of the cage just before locking Nash and Hogan in. Austin then loaded Hall into the back of his truck and drove him to ringside before hitting him with a stunner and spray-painting "3:16" on his back.

8. Peculiar posedown. Billy and Chuck are proud of their physiques. And they should be—they're two extremely well-built young men. But they never should have challenged Torrie Wilson and Stacy Keibler to a posedown. Billy and Chuck did their best on February 5, but some sultry poses and an unbelievable crowd reaction easily gave the two lovely ladies the win.

7. Miss Hancock. Vince McMahon is a very demanding boss. Only the most dedicated, hard-working professionals have any desire to work directly for him. Enter Stacy Keibler. On April 9, McMahon interviewed candidates to fill his personal assistant position. Keibler blew away the competition when she got on top of McMahon's desk and danced for him in one of her Miss Hancock specials. When she sat on the desk and wrapped her legs around his neck, Vince got so excited, he literally fell out of his chair.



Hancock again for a night!

6. One for one. After Hulk Hogan abandoned the New World Order, Kevin Nash and Scott Hall were in dire need of a third member. On March 19, they got one. That night, Hogan tried to save The Rock from an NWO attack, but X-Pac, who hadn't been seen on TV for months, ran out from the back and attacked Hogan with a chair. Then he spray-painted "NWO" across Hogan's back.

5. The other rookie. All Brock Lesnar had to do to make us drop our collective jaw was show up on TV. He's *that* big. Randy Orton, on the other hand, isn't as intimidating. But that didn't stop him from pulling off an upset of Hardcore Holly on April 23, the night of his first appearance on TV. Word has it that Holly is still smarting from that loss.

4. Goodbye. Bradshaw and Faarooq, the APA, will go down in history as one of the toughest tag teams in the history of the sport. On March 26, they said their goodbyes, since Bradshaw was drafted for *Raw* and Faarooq for *Smackdown.* After one last scuffle with William Regal, they hung a poignant sign on the door of their backstage office: "Sorry, we're closed."

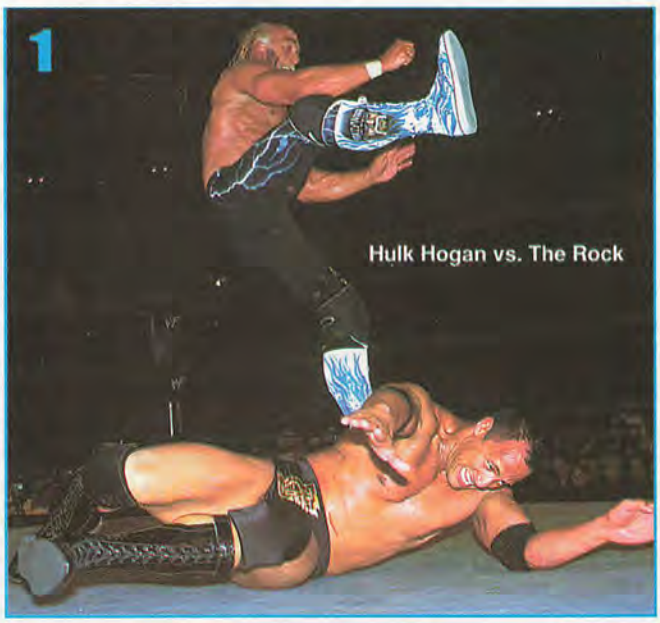
3. Y2J gets serious. WWE World heavyweight champion Chris Jericho was seen as a huge underdog going into his match against The Rock at the Royal Rumble. On January 15, Jericho demanded respect. He interrupted a Rock promo and sternly told him, "I am not a joke, you stupid son of a bitch." Ten days later, Jericho retained his title at the pay-per-view.

2. "Stone-Cold" stubborn. With the threat of the NWO looming on the horizon, Vince McMahon gave Ric Flair an opportunity to "save" WWE by selling back all of his stock. On January 29, Flair was in the middle of signing the contract when Steve Austin interrupted the proceedings. He gave McMahon a "Stone-Cold" stunner as Flair up tore the contract.

1. New World Order. On January 22, Vince McMahon talked to an unidentified person backstage throughout *Smackdown's* broadcast. At the end of the show, he said, "I am not going to let Flair kill what I created. I am going to kill what I created. I am going to inject the WWF with a lethal poison." When McMahon turned around and revealed that he had been talking to himself in a mirror the entire time, the NWO logo—painted on the back of his chair—made its debut on WWF TV. □

TOP 20 PPV MATCHES

1. Hulk Hogan vs. **The Rock** (WrestleMania X8)
Okay, so it wasn't a scientific classic. Hogan had a case of ring rust. The Rock was a bit sloppy at times. If any two wrestlers other than Hogan and Rock had wrestled this exact match, if 68,237 fans hadn't been in a frenzy from bell to bell, if it hadn't been so darn dramatic, and if it hadn't been at the biggest show of the year, it wouldn't have made the top 20, much less been named Match of the Half-Year. But it was all those things and more. Hogan tried his hardest to get the fans to hate him. It just didn't work. The fans in Toronto came to cheer for the "Hulkster," and both men quickly realized it. If that meant booing The Rock, so be it. After a back-and-forth contest, Hogan tore into "The Great One" with his weight belt. Rock rallied, tore the strap from Hogan's hands, and opened his own can of whoop ass. The fans booed. When Rock connected with a Rock bottom, it looked like it was all over. And then the "Hulkster" hulked up. Hogan kicked out at two. He got to his knees and shook off a series of punches. His nostrils flared. He wagged his index finger. The fans went bananas. Hogan threw Rock into the ropes, lifted the big boot, and bounded off the ropes for the legdrop of doom. Rock kicked out and eventually pinned "The Immortal One" after a people's elbow. While Rock won the match, Hogan never passed the proverbial torch. Instead, he carried it himself. It was 1984 all over again.



Hulk Hogan vs. The Rock

2. Royal Rumble match (Royal Rumble)
The Rumble always offers its share of drama, humor, excitement, mystery, and surprises. This year's was one of the most exciting in recent memory. It celebrated the return of one of the WWF's most intense competitors in Triple-H, marked the returns of Val Venis, Mr. Perfect, and Goldust, and featured the surprise elimination of The Undertaker by Maven. In the end, Kurt Angle thought he had eliminated Hunter with a backdrop, but "The Game" grabbed the ropes and held on. As Angle began a premature celebration, Triple-H connected with a clothesline to win.

3. Billy Kidman vs. **Tajiri** (Backlash)
Kidman and Tajiri delivered the kind of match that made a lot of fans care about the cruiserweight title again. This Backlash contest also had an intriguing back story. Kidman and Torrie Wilson had been an item in the past, and Torrie's relationship with Tajiri was on the verge of breaking down completely. With a beautiful woman seemingly at stake, both Tajiri and Kidman delivered their best performances in the company to date. For that night at least, Tajiri walked away with the girl and the gold.

4. Ric Flair vs. **Vince McMahon** (Royal Rumble)
This match had no business being this good. Of course, it seems like we write that every time Vince McMahon wrestles. Vinnie Mac may not be hitting five-star frog splashes, but he always delivers exciting matches. Flair has done the same for more than 20 years; his victory might have been the old WCW's shining moment.

5. Kurt Angle vs. **Edge** (Judgment Day)
Last time Edge beat Kurt Angle on PPV, it was partially due to Christian's interference at the 2001 King of the Ring tournament. After losing to Angle at Backlash, Edge knew he had something to prove. He was so sure that victory would be his on this night that he put his hair on the line. The gamble paid off.

6. Eddie Guerrero vs. **Rob Van Dam** (Judgment Day)
It didn't take long for Guerrero to remind WWE fans how much they had missed his "Latino Heat." This also was a Backlash rematch—and the same man won. Guerrero was able to avoid most of Van Dam's kicks and frustrated RVD by handing him a second straight PPV loss, though Eddie's foot was on the ropes during the pin.

7. The Undertaker vs. **Ric Flair** (WrestleMania X8)
Undertaker proved he's as nasty as he wants to be. UT goaded Flair into the match by brutalizing his son David and best friend, Arn Anderson, in the weeks leading up to 'Mania. Then he made one of the most dominant wrestlers of the 20th century a bloody mess and finished him with his old tombstone piledriver.

8. Triple-H vs. **Chris Jericho** (Judgment Day)
"The Game" vs. wrestling's newest "Living Legend" in a "Hell In A Cell" match. It turned into a gorefest and ended with a Triple-H pedigree on top of the cage after Triple-H and Y2J used the cage itself, a ladder, a chair, and a two-by-four wrapped in barbed wire to turn each other into hamburger.

9. Edge vs. **Kurt Angle** (Backlash)
Edge had enthusiasm to spare and plenty of fire in the belly as he prepared for this one. Angle had the experience and the

OF THE HALF-YEAR

common sense to steer clear of the spear. Angle simply overpowered and outwrestled his former friend at Backlash. It would be a different story a month later.

10. Rob Van Dam vs. **Eddie Guerrero** (Backlash)
RVD didn't seem to have an answer for Guerrero in their first PPV meeting. Guerrero frustrated the Intercontinental champ by matching his speed and keeping him off-balance with a variety of holds and takedowns on the mat. He seemed to be on a mission for redemption, and he got it.

11. Kurt Angle vs. **Triple-H** (No Way Out)
Before Triple-H was ready to face Jericho at WrestleMania, he had some unfinished business to take care of in the form of Angle. Unfortunately, biased officiating by guest referee Stephanie McMahon and two chair shots from Angle ultimately did in Helmsley.

12. Chris Jericho vs. **The Rock** (Royal Rumble)
By conventional thinking, Rock seemed to have this match won before it started. By winning, Rock could have captured the undisputed championship in time for WrestleMania, but Jericho simply wanted it a little more. Probably Y2J's greatest match as undisputed champ.

13. Chris Jericho vs. **Steve Austin** (No Way Out)
Damn the NWO! If not for the New World Order's interference, there's little doubt Austin would have reclaimed the undisputed title. Still, credit Jericho for finding a way to walk out of the ring with the belt still around his waist.

14. Rob Van Dam vs. **Goldust** (No Way Out)
On paper, Van Dam vs. Goldust looks like a complete style mismatch. But Goldust returned to the WWF in the best shape of his life. Dustin Rhodes showed he still has what it takes to be a player in the big league, even if he did lose this match.

15. Steve Austin vs. **Scott Hall** (WrestleMania X8)
This one won't rack up many points for style, but it was good for what J.R. calls "physicality." In other words, it was a good short brawl. It was fast-paced and lasted less than 10 minutes, but in those nine-plus minutes, we got all the usual Austin moves and an Austin win.

16. Six-way cruiserweight elimination match (WWA: The Revolution)
Chris Daniels, Low-Ki, and A.J. Styles were aware of their reputations as three of the best lesser-known talents in wrestling. That's why they were committed to making the most of their PPV debuts. Those three and Shark Boy, Tony Mamaluke, and Nova delivered an exciting match won by Nova.

16 Tony Mamaluke vs. Shark Boy

Kurt Angle vs. Triple-H 11

17. Dallas Page vs. **Christian** (WrestleMania X8)
Remember this feud? It didn't last long. Although the match hardly stole the show at WrestleMania, it stole the undercard. Like Austin vs. Hall, it was short, but the two packed a lot of action into six minutes. Page retained his European title.

18. Jazz vs. **Trish Stratus** (Backlash)
Jazz restored credibility to the WWF women's championship. Surprisingly, Stratus has developed into a legitimate wrestler. The clear underdog in this one, Stratus surprised the champ with her tenacity. Jazz' fisherman buster ended up making all the difference.

19. Steve Austin vs. **Undertaker** (Backlash)
We've all seen the match more times than we care to remember, but Undertaker looked rejuvenated for this number-one contenders' match at Backlash. This was a punch-and-kick-fest, but Ric Flair's presence as referee turned a played-out feud into an intriguing match in which UT prevailed.

20. Devon Storm vs. **Sabu** (WWA: The Revolution)
Storm and Sabu got as extreme as they could in their 22-minute battle at WWA: The Revolution. This may have been the most vicious PPV match of 2002 up to that point. Storm won it by pinfall. □

THE MID-YEAR AWARDS

WRESTLER OF THE HALF-YEAR: THE UNDERTAKER

Apparently, tormenting Ric Flair is a heck of a career move. At the Royal Rumble, Undertaker was unceremoniously eliminated by Maven. At No Way Out, 'Taker fell victim to a Rock Bottom in a loss to The Rock. That's when he started

trying to goad the "Nature Boy" into signing on for a match with him (Flair, you see, interfered in UT's match with Rock).

Through his attacks on David Flair and Arn Anderson, UT was able to push all the right buttons, and the battle for respect was on. Though Flair wrestled with all the energy and passion he could muster, Undertaker simply overwhelmed Flair to extend his career WrestleMania record to 10-0.

That victory was enough to put The Undertaker back on the title track. Since 'Mania, Undertaker has been truly dominant. At Backlash, he was able to take advantage of a questionable call from Flair, who was serving as special referee, and score a pinfall victory over Steve Austin in a match to determine the number-one contender for the undisputed title.

At Judgment Day, Undertaker proved to be too much for old nemesis Hulk Hogan and was able to collect his first WWE World title in three years. Now that "The Dead Man" is the champion again, he's not showing any signs of mellowing. Triple-H, Tommy Dreamer, Rob Van Dam, and regular UT whipping boys Matt and Jeff Hardy can certainly attest to that.

Prior to the brand extension, Undertaker wasn't focused on the WWF World title. It had been so long since 'Taker had made a strong runs for the championship. Now he's once again the top dog in WWE, and he has no intention of relinquishing his stranglehold on the company.

TAG TEAM OF THE HALF-YEAR: BILLY GUNN & CHUCK PALUMBO

This mid-year award serves two purposes. First, it is a grudging admission that Billy Gunn and Chuck Palumbo have developed into a formidable tag team. Second, it is a scathing indictment on the sad state of tag team wrestling today.

We gave serious consideration to giving this award to Ohio Valley Wrestling's Lords of the Ring, Nick Dinsmore and Rob Conway. If The Island Boys weren't plagued by injuries, they would have had a shot at taking this award. In the end, we finally decided that although Billy and Chuck don't exactly conjure memories of The Road Warriors or Steiners, they deserve credit for finding ways to successfully defend the title against the likes of The APA, the Dudleys, Al Snow and Maven, and the Hardys.

When they were drafted by Vince McMahon for *Smackdown,* it looked like the Billy and Chuck era would go on indefinitely. After the brand extension, The APA and the Dudleys were no more, and the Hardys were stuck on *Raw,* where they couldn't compete for the title. With Rico running interference, Billy and Chuck looked almost unbeatable—that is, until Rico was forced to team with Rikishi against them … and Rikishi singlehandedly won the gold for the team. It took Billy and Chuck but a few weeks to regain the title.

Despite their effeminate ways, the fact of the matter is that Gunn and Palumbo are tremendous tag team competitors. In fact, Gunn is the most decorated tag team wrestler in

WWE history, having won belts with both Mike Barton (Bart Gunn) and Road Dogg before meeting Palumbo. Palumbo has only been wrestling for a few years, but he's also a three-time former WCW World tag champion. We just wish we had a chance to see how they would fare against higher quality opposition on a more consistent basis.

MOST POPULAR WRESTLER OF THE HALF-YEAR: HULK HOGAN

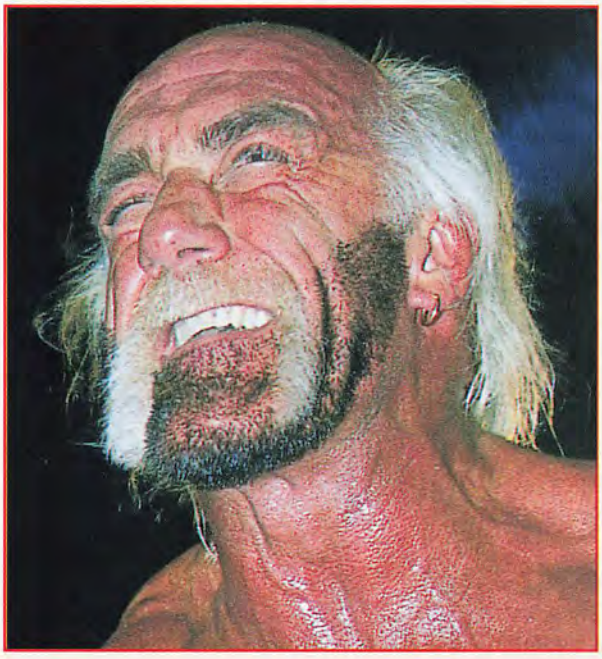
If you had any doubt in your mind, you must not have been at a live WWE event since WrestleMania.

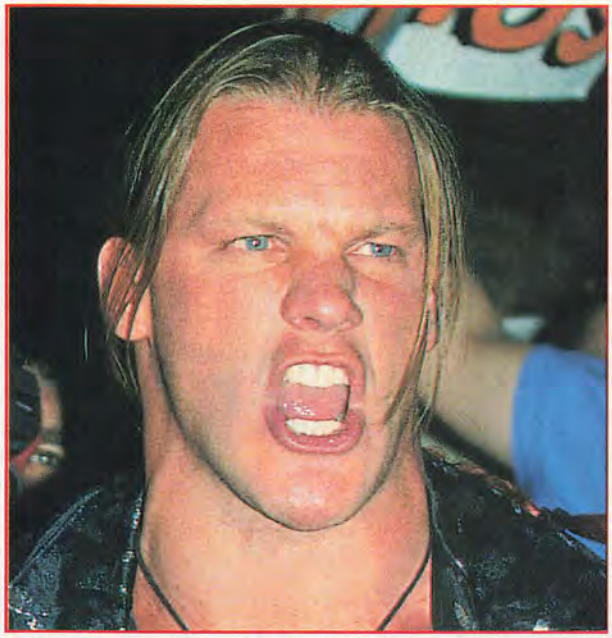
When Hulk Hogan made his way to the ring at the SkyDome in Toronto, it was as if we had *all* been propelled back to 1990. WCW fans may have grown tired of Hogan over the past seven years, but WWE fans clearly look back on the original "Hulkamania" era from behind rose-colored glasses. It's almost as if Hogan's half-decade of heelish behavior never happened.

Despite everything that *has* happened with Hogan over the last few years (and there has been plenty of bad stuff), the fans now look at and treat Hogan as a true wrestling legend. He was the star force that made WrestleMania (not just this year's) a reality, and the effect he has had on wrestling cannot be overstated. The fans wanted to see the "Hulkster" go back to the red and yellow and head into the twilight of his career soaking in the cheers he covets.

And Hogan clearly is thrilled to be the hero once again. He's feeding off the fans' adulation and wrestling some of his better matches of the past few years. He's even trying a few new moves! For a moment there, it looked like Hogan's lasting legacy could have been his embarrassing dismissal by Vince Russo in 2000 and a tarnished reputation as a man who helped run WCW into the ground. Instead, the "Hulkster" came home, and the fans welcomed him as they had never welcomed him before.

If we had Comeback of the Half-Year honors, Hogan would have walked away with those as well.





MOST HATED WRESTLER OF THE HALF-YEAR: CHRIS JERICHO

If it had been Steve Austin, The Rock, or maybe even Kurt Angle who unified the WCW and WWF world titles last December, the fans probably would have been satisfied. But when the dust settled, it was Chris Jericho who emerged as wrestling's first undisputed world champion in about four decades.

And he never got tired of reminding us of that. Add Stephanie McMahon to the mix, and the whining, arrogant self-appointed "Living Legend" became almost impossible to cheer. Heck, Larry Zbyszko even railed on Y2J during the WWA's foray into pay-per-view in February!

Jericho infuriated the fans in two ways. First, he almost never won a match cleanly as undisputed champ; he escaped with the title at the Royal Rumble and No Way Out because of outside interference. In addition, if you ignore the fact that he cheated, Jericho proved to be a surprisingly strong World champion. The fans thought Rock and Austin would have their way in the ring with Y2J. Instead, Jericho fought with a newfound intensity and exploited any weakness he could find. And it worked.

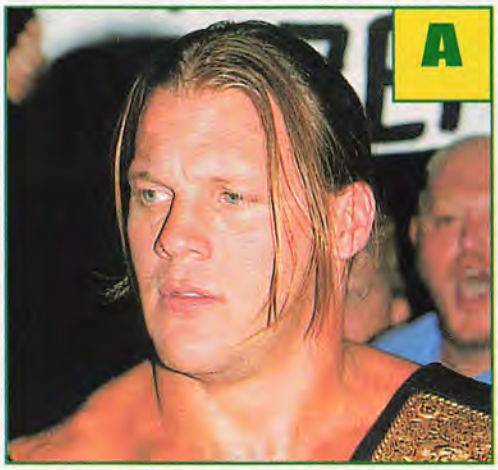
As was the case with Ric Flair in the 1980s, the fans desperately wanted to see Jericho lose. Every time he stepped into the ring, Jericho appeared to be at a physical disadvantage. Still, he always seemed to find a way to walk out of the ring with the belt around his waist. That made the fans loathe him even more.

Consider this: The NWO invaded and tried to end Rock's career. And the fans still booed Jericho (and Stephanie) more than those guys. Now *that's* hatred.

THE MID-YEAR GRADES

WHILE GRADE SCHOOLS, high schools, and colleges wrap up classes in May or June, professional wrestling runs on a much different schedule. The sport's semester stretches all the way from January 1 to December 31, and there aren't any significant breaks in between to give the wrestlers a rest. It's a rigorous business, and only the strongest survive. So, remember, even those wrestlers who earn "D's" and "F's" are some of the toughest hombres around. More than likely, they're simply struggling. Nothing more, nothing less.

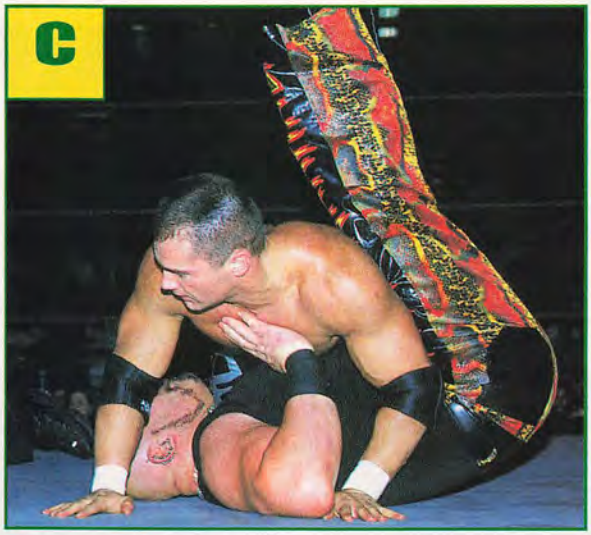
THEY GET AN "A": **Chris Jericho** will go down in history as one of the most underappreciated WWE World heavyweight champions ever. That's unfortunate, because his run as WWE champ was one of the best that we've seen in a while … **Triple-H** came back from quadriceps surgery like a man who had built up a lot of rage during his eight months on the shelf. Too bad Stephanie McMahon and Hulk Hogan stole so much of his thunder. Nevertheless, he dominated all of his feuds and was in the World title picture from the day he returned to competition … We never thought we'd give **Hulk Hogan** a grade this good again. He definitely deserves it, though … **Booker T** may not be a top-tier player for WWE yet, but he's been one of the promotion's most consistent entertainers … **Rob Van Dam** is a star whom WWE won't be able to hold down much longer … **The Undertaker** continues to impress with his refusal to rest on his past accomplishments … **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** is the breakout star of the *Raw* brand … **Trish Stratus** and **Jazz** both earn "A's" for what they've done for the women's division … A surprise "A" goes to the team of **Billy Gunn** and **Chuck Palumbo**. Not only did they have a solid run as WWE World tag team champs, they also made us bust a gut in the process … Another surprise "A" goes to **The Hurricane**. (We'd give it to his mild-mannered alter-ego, but he might not appreciate us blowing his cover) … And one more surprise "A" goes to **Maven**, who has proven that the *Tough Enough* process can and will work.



THEY GET A "B": **Stone-Cold" Steve Austin** may be WWE's MVP. He may do more for the company than any other superstar and work as hard as anyone, but he was stuck in some silly feuds for much of the half-year … **The Rock** had better thank his lucky stars that he feuded with Hogan this year, because without that big, important WrestleMania match he easily could have easily fallen into "C" territory … **Edge** continued to show improvement in his feuds with William Regal and Kurt Angle … **Jeff Jarrett** is one of the few wrestlers that the World Wrestling All-Stars promotion could always count on … **Scott Hall** may have been trouble behind the curtain, but in the ring, he was the New World Order's most effective wrestler … **Bradshaw** was in the top tier long enough to pound a beer or two, but it wasn't a good fit … **Brock Lesnar** is not Bill Goldberg, and that's okay with us … **Kane** underwent quite the personality change this year. It was goofy, but we kind of liked it … **The Big Show** finally looks revitalized … **William Regal** uses the knucks to win matches, but he does so effectively … **Tajiri** breathes so much life into *Smackdown's* cruiserweight division it's ridiculous … So does **Billy Kidman** … **Randy Orton** performed well in OVW and carried that success right into *Smackdown* … **Eddie Guerrero's** career is finally back on track … **Spike Dudley** wins us over every time he steps into the ring … **Goldust** turns our stomach every time we look at him, but he's been a very effective heel … We liked **Deacon Bautista** when he was OVW's Leviathan a whole lot more, but give him time.

THEY GET A "C": A messed up wheel and a not-so-significant run with World Wrestling All-Stars pretty much sums up **Scott Steiner's** half-year … There's no way that **Kurt Angle** should ever earn a "C," but looking at his half-year, it's difficult to give him anything higher … Competing on *Raw,* where they can't pursue the WWE World tag team championship, **The Hardy Boyz** have foundered … Before getting

ARE IN...



injured on the set of *Dark Angel,* **Lita** also had gone the way of the Hardys ... **"Diamond" Dallas Page** worked hard (as usual) but ended up without anything to show for it—other than a career-threatening spinal injury ... We know that he just started using it, but **Rev. D-Von** needs a new gimmick (and probably Buh Buh Ray in his corner, too) ... **X-Pac** is lucky he has friends in high places ... **Molly Holly** needs to pick a gimmick and stick with it (this latest one has potential) ... Maybe **Rikishi's** career is stuck up his (you fill in the blank) ... **Rico** was an unnecessary addition to Billy and Chuck ... **Jacquelyn** did okay in the women's division and did beat Crash Holly in some meaningless matches ... **Lance Storm** might have gotten a better grade if *PWI's* offices were based in Canada, but we doubt it.

THEY GET A "D": **Christian's** had a very tough time of it in the singles ranks ... **Sean O'Haire** went from the can't-miss prospect of The Natural Born Killers to a guy who WWE officials aren't sure will ever break out of the developmental territories ... **Hardcore Holly** sure looks tough against those *Tough Enough* contestants and rookies, doesn't he? ... We really wish we could give **Jerry Lynn** a higher grade, but, in all honesty, we can't ... Can somebody wake up **Test**? ... **Faarooq** needs to compete a little more ... It looked for a moment like **D-Lo Brown** would get a push against William Regal, but *only* for a moment ... **"Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig** had a nice Royal Rumble but all but disappeared soon afterward and then was fired ... What has **Mark Henry** done besides impress us with feats of strength? ... Someone tell **Shawn Stasiak** that this grade does not reflect how *entertaining* he is as Planet Stasiak ... **Raven** deserves a push as a wrestler, but looking at his situation realistically, he might want to rethink his decision to leave the announcers' table ... **Steven Richards** had a higher profile as the leader of Right To Censor.

THEY GET AN "F": **Albert** went from being a "Hip-Hop Hippo" to a flat-out channel changer ... We're not even sure **Rick Steiner** should be included on this year's list ... **Tommy Dreamer's** *Jackass* gimmick is making him look like a damn jackass, but at least he's on TV ... **Justin Credible** he wasn't ... Why doesn't **Crash Holly** compete in the cruiserweight division? It's better than losing to Jacquelyn ... This hurts us just as much as it hurts you, **Big Bossman** ... **The Big Valbowski's** career has become unbearably stagnant.

THEY GET AN "INCOMPLETE": **Ric Flair** has been a convincing owner, he just doesn't wrestle often enough ... **Kevin Nash**, on the other hand, has been a convincing menace while barely stepping foot inside the ring ... **Scotty Too Hotty** needs a total gimmick overhaul once his neck heals ... Despite being on the injured list, **Chris Benoit** was still one of Vince McMahon's top draft picks ... Has anyone seen **Hugh Morrus**? ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.'s** appearances are way too infrequent to give him any kind of grade ... If we didn't know any better, we'd say that **Steve Blackman** is cursed ... **Perry Saturn** must be somewhere getting even more tattoos while he nurses his latest injury ... **Al Snow** and **Ivory** can chalk up their grades to their *Tough Enough 2* commitments ... **Tazz** can chalk up his grade to his color commentator commitments. □

SECOND HALF PREDICTIONS

Sting will return to wrestling—in NWA-TNA

Wrestling is no longer the most important thing in Steve Borden's life.

Today, the man known to wrestling fans as seven-time former NWA/WCW World champion Sting is more concerned with his family and his spiritual beliefs. In light of that, it's highly unlikely Sting would even consider signing a WWE contract, both because of the hectic schedule the WWE keeps and some of its morally questionable storylines.

Sting vs. Jarrett in NWA-TNA?

NWA-TNA could be a viable alternative for the "Stinger." Sting has always enjoyed the thrill of competing in front of the fans; it's the backstage politicking and constant travel that he could do without. With NWA-TNA, Sting could return to the ring on a part-time basis (just once every two weeks), and if he rediscovers his passion for wrestling, he could once again be a major force.

Of course, this is assuming the "TNA" in NWA-TNA does, in fact, stand for Total Nonstop Action. If it actually stands for a little too much T & A, don't expect to see Sting in the ring or in the rafters.

Hulk Hogan will regain the WWE title

Whether you like it or you don't, we haven't seen the end of "Hulkamania." In fact, the stars seem properly aligned for Hogan's farewell tour to extend well into the foreseeable future, probably until the end of 2002 at least.

Consider this: With The Rock off in Hollywood and Steve Austin tied up fighting with wrestlers and management alike, Hogan is, for now, one of the top two fan favorites on the *Smackdown* side. Hogan is the most shameless self-promoter in the business. In these days of patriotism, who better to represent the WWE than the original "Real American"? One thing's for sure: Hogan's not likely to voluntarily walk away from the spotlight.

Hogan still matches up exceedingly well against The Undertaker. He could be wearing the undisputed title by the time you read these words.

Ric Flair will re-form The Four Horsemen in WWE

Now that Shawn Michaels has returned to the fold, the NWO appears to be on the verge of a full-fledged babyface turn. That would leave Ric Flair out in the cold. Flair didn't become the dirtiest player in the game by not having a backup plan for every contingency.

And Flair doesn't necessarily have to select among active *Raw* wrestlers to assemble a new incarnation of the Horsemen. Now that the "Nature Boy" and Vince McMahon seem to have made peace, there's always the possibility that we could see some *Raw-Smackdown* trades. Just imagine a Four Horsemen 2002 consisting of Flair, Brock Lesnar, Chris Benoit, and Eddie Guerrero.

Sean O'Haire will win the OVW title

As the head of security for Bolin Services in Ohio Valley Wrestling, the former Natural Born Thriller has positioned him-

Get ready to call O'Haire a champ

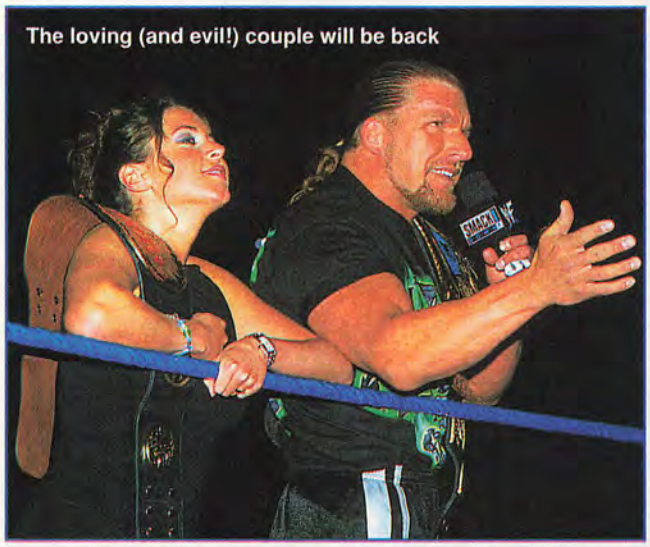
self as the enforcer for former OVW champ Prototype. Thus far, Prototype has had his hands full with new OVW champion Nova. Look for Kenny "The King" Bolin to send O'Haire after Nova to soften Nova up for Prototype, only to then see O'Haire win the belt himself. O'Haire's not as dumb as some people in OVW think. He has probably been plotting for months.

Mark Henry and Faarooq will win the WWE tag title

Together, Faarooq and Henry would make up one of the most powerful teams in wrestling history. Don't think these two—who were once teammates in a little group called The Nation— haven't noticed that, either. Faarooq has been a tag team specialist for the past several years. At this stage of his career, he's not looking to start over in the singles ranks. In Henry, Faarooq has a willing student. And a man to win him beer money whenever necessary.

Triple-H will reunite with Stephanie McMahon

Sounds unbelievable, doesn't it? Believe it. Triple-H has done very little since adopting the fan favorite style. His long-awaited World title reign lasted from WrestleMania to Backlash, a mere five weeks. Then Triple-H was shoved out of the way in favor of Hulk Hogan. Triple-H is a natural heel. Since he is a *Smackdown* wrestler, the NWO doesn't seem to be a viable option. For Hunter to go back to his rulebreaking roots, he needs to take Hogan out with a sledgehammer. And he'll have Stephanie at his side as he does so. What better way to make sure the fans boo him?



The loving (and evil!) couple will be back

Neither Goldberg nor Scott Steiner will appear in WWE

While TV ratings have been sagging and arena attendance is down, WWE has not yet reached the point at which it will do anything (read: overpay) for a chance to play the Goldberg card.

New belt for Prototype later this year

The former WCW phenom has a reputation for not being a team player and has been highly critical of WWE in the past. Goldberg would also not be the most popular guy in the locker room. Considering he hasn't wrestled in almost a year-and-a-half, WWE won't be in a huge rush to bring him on board. Instead it will allow him to give Japan a try first.

Steiner remains a medical question mark. While WWE might want him down the road, it would most likely save his debut for the 2003 Royal Rumble or perhaps No Way Out. Right now, WWE simply isn't ready for "Big Poppa Pump."

Rey Misterio Jr., Prototype, and Victoria will make their debuts on WWE TV

This one seems like a lock. At press time, all three were competing in WWE developmental territories, although for Misterio, that was only because he needed a few weeks to shake off some ring rust. Misterio will shake up the WWE cruiserweight division on *Smackdown.* With both Jazz and Lita out with injuries, WWE is desperate to bring in more ladies to fill out its women's division. Prototype is just so good on the mike and so innovative in the ring that WWE has to be positively salivating at the prospect of matching him up against Van Dam or Guerrero for the I-C belt.

Not only will Rey-Rey, Queen Victoria, and Prototype debut on TV by year's end—they'll win the cruiserweight, women's, and Intercontinental titles, respectively. □

the business page

By Harry Burkett

Austin out, Russo to the rescue ... Less than a week after walking out of WWE, Steve Austin was accused of spousal abuse by his wife, Debra, who called police and claimed "Stone-Cold" had beaten her on the head, back, and legs during an argument in their home in Texas. Austin left the residence before police arrived on the scene.

According to the Reuters news service, Austin called the residence and talked to police on the phone. But because Debra didn't file charges, Austin was not considered a fugitive or required to report to the authorities. Unless she chooses to press charges in the future, the matter will not be investigated further.

This incident occurred during the same weekend as a controversial edition of *Confidential* in which Vince McMahon and Jim Ross expressed their disappointment over Austin's unwillingness to discuss his professional problems "like a man." Surprisingly, this edition of *Confidential,* which was heavily hyped during *Smackdown* and on wwe.com, drew only a 1.2 rating. That is a decent rating for its 11 p.m. Eastern time slot, but it fell short of the consecutive 1.3 ratings for the programs featuring the Shawn Michaels interviews and Davey Boy Smith tribute.

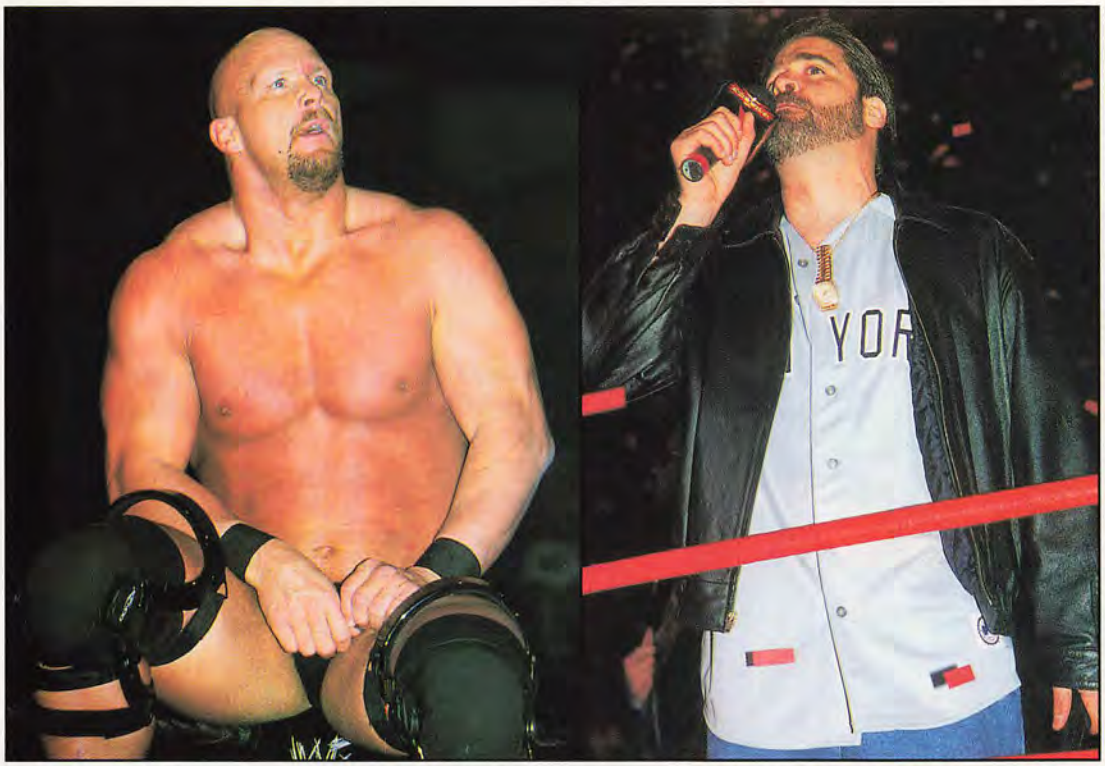
While *Confidential, Velocity, Sunday Night Heat,* and other secondary shows are doing above-average numbers, the same cannot be said for *Raw* and *Smackdown. Raw* has sunk into the high 3.0s for the most part, and *Smackdown* is hovering around 3.5 in the broadcast ratings.

Vince McMahon, who often resorts to desperate measures in the face of sagging ratings, has resorted to the most drastic of them all: rehiring Vince Russo. Although Russo is considered partly responsible for the demise of WCW, he was instrumental in helping McMahon launch the wildly successful "WWF Attitude" campaign in the mid-1990s. In fact, McMahon resisted Russo's risque approach for quite a while until the ratings proved it was working.

If Russo considers himself the master of "Crash TV," he should regard this as a perfect opportunity.

NWA-TNA does okay ... The long-awaited pay-per-view debut of the Jarrett family's Total Nonstop Action promotion finally happened on June 19 in Huntsville, Alabama. The early reviews were mostly positive. The quality of the PPV was lower than a good WWE pay-per-view, as expected, but was considered just as good—if not slightly better—than a typical *Raw* or *Smackdown.* And it was a much-needed alternative.

Before the event, Jerry Jarrett remarked that he didn't think fans would mind paying $9.95 for two hours of commercial-free television. He also cites the creative and athletic freedom of



It's out with the old and in with the ... old at WWE. Was it coincidence that less than two weeks after Steve Austin (above left) walked out on the company, Vince Russo, the man who was in large part responsible for the WWF's "Attitude" campaign (above right), was rehired? Probably only Vince McMahon and those in his inner circle know for sure.

a commercial-free event.

The question is whether fans will pay that amount every week (or whether enough potential customers even know about NWA-TNA), despite the fact that discounts will likely become available for multi-event buyers.

The big news coming out of the pay-per-view is that Ken Shamrock is the new NWA champion. Shamrock and Malice (formerly The Wall) were the two remaining combatants in a Rumble-style event dubbed "Gauntlet For The Gold." Then former NWA World champion Rick Steamboat officiated a regulation match between Shamrock and Malice for the vacant championship. Shamrock used a belly-to-belly suplex for the victory. A showdown between Shamrock and fellow UFC star Dan Severn seems inevitable.

Other top stars in the "Gauntlet" included Jeff Jarrett, Scott Hall, Steve Corino, Brian Christopher, Konnan, Buff Bagwell, Rick Steiner, Norman Smiley, and Lash LeRoux. Country music star Toby Keith made a surprise entrance in the "Gauntlet" and eliminated Jarrett, but he did not carry home the NWA belt.

Perhaps WWE recruited Vince Russo in the nick of time.

Ventura bows out ... Jesse Ventura told listeners of a Minnesota Public Radio program in June that he would not seek re-election as governor. The filing deadline for the election was July 16, and many of Ventura's friends and colleagues were aware that "The Body" was tiring of politics.

On the morning of June 18, Minnesotans awoke to the headline, "People's House Or Party Pad?" The newspaper story alleged that Ventura's 22-year-old son, Tyrel, and his friends damaged furniture during get-togethers at the governor's mansion.

"I will always protect my family first," Ventura said on the radio program. "You have to have your heart and soul into these types of jobs. I feel that it is time to go back to the private sector."

In regard to the reporters Ventura often calls "jackals," he asserted, "My son is a terrific kid, and he is being misportrayed, libeled, and slandered. I think families should be left out of it. Children should be left out of it. They didn't run for office."

Actually, Ventura had little to gain and much to lose by running for a second term. Only six months away from Election Day, Ventura faced a large budget deficit, a cantankerous legislature, and approval ratings that had plummeted from 70 percent to a level of 43 percent at press time.

No, Jesse Ventura will not be raising his right hand and swearing to anything shortly after Election Day 2002. Not unless Minnesota voters elect him as a write-in candidate. The controversial Minnesota governor announced in June that he would not be seeking a second term.

In the meantime, Ventura has probably noticed that former President Bill Clinton earned $9-million on speaking engagements alone during the past year. Ventura, who is far more popular nationally than statewide, would be a charismatic and popular attraction on the speaking circuit.

Ventura added, however, that he would serve if elected as a write-in candidate. His wife, Terry, who was also on the radio program, chimed, "I knew I couldn't trust you."

WWFE Stockwatch

(For the period of May 1-31)

30-Day High: 15.30 on May 7
30-Day Low: 14.01 on May 30
52-Week High: 15.83 on March 20, 2002
52-Week Low: 10.31 on September 17, 2001

Although Vince McMahon made a strange face when the mayor of Melbourne, Australia, referred to WWE's "Global Warming" tour as "WrestleMania," the first 48 hours of ticket sales must have felt like a WrestleMania moment anyway. Fans purchased more than 47,000 tickets during that two-day period, and, depending on the final seating configuration at Melbourne's Colonial Stadium, more tickets might go on sale. The date for the Melbourne show was August 10.

Astoundingly, more than 150,000 fans attempted to call Australia's Ticketmaster7 during the first hour. "In my 20 years in the ticketing industry I have not witnessed such a large number of avid fans so desperate to secure tickets," said Maria O'Connor, managing director of Ticketmaster7. Fans swamped the Ticketmaster7 Web site at the same time.

In unrelated news, NBC's partnership with WWE is officially over. WWE bought back the three percent stake of its company that NBC had purchased as part of the XFL deal. Interestingly, WWE purchased NBC's stock at the original price of $27.7-million, or $12 per share. Considering that the stock was selling for $15.21 per share on May 17, WWE effectively bought the shares at a 21 percent discount. Damn that Vince!

TV breakdown

Week beginning May 6

Raw (TNN): 4.5

Analysis: Jim Ross and Jerry Lawler tripped over their tongues as they tried to get the "F" out and refer to the former WWF as "WWE." William Regal regained the European title from Spike Dudley, who had suffered an ankle injury during his title defense against Regal at Insurrextion two nights earlier. Perhaps the anticipated heel turn of Ric Flair prompted the strong 4.5 rating, and the "Nature Boy" delivered by attacking Austin during a six-man main event.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.6

Analysis: Vince McMahon lured Triple-H into a trap during the opening segment, enabling Test, Christian, Lance Storm, Hardcore Holly, and D-Von Dudley to beat "The Game" to a bloody pulp. The crazed Triple-H interfered in the main event by smashing all of the participants—Kurt Angle, Chris Jericho, Hulk Hogan, and Edge—with his trusty sledgehammer.

Excess (TNN): 0.8

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 1.1

Week beginning May 13

Raw (TNN): 3.9

Analysis: The rating for *Raw* plunged by six-tenths of a point this week, despite the promise of another lively Canadian crowd in Toronto. Because Toronto fans seemed to give Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair new life at WrestleMania X8, this might have been the best venue for Hogan's WWE title defense against Flair. Steve Austin defeated new NWO member Booker T in a lumberjack match, but fell victim to a gang attack by the NWO, Flair, and Arn Anderson afterward.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.6

Analysis: Why was *Smackdown* struggling to keep up with *Raw* at this point? On paper, it seems to be the quality of matches. This edition featured Randy Orton and The Big Valbowski vs. Hardcore Holly and Lance Storm, D-Von Dudley vs. Maven, and Rikishi vs. Rico—none of which seems particularly compelling. Even Kurt Angle and Chris Jericho vs. Triple-H and Edge lacks sizzle these days. Something is wrong when The Hurricane has the best night of anyone.

Excess (TNN): 0.7

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 0.9

Week beginning May 20

Raw (TNN): 3.7

Analysis: Despite the fact that they tried to ignore the deaths of Lou Thesz and Wahoo McDaniel, Vince McMahon narrated a nice tribute to the late Davey Boy Smith. Later, Rob Van Dam's pin of WWE World champion The Undertaker could have been his breakout moment, if not for Ric Flair spotting the champ's foot on the rope and ordering the match to continue ('Taker went on to win). The Steve Austin-Eddie Guerrero karaoke segment was long and awful. No wonder Austin walked out.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.6

Analysis: Kurt Angle using amateur headgear to keep a wig on his bald head was one of the funniest *Smackdown* moments of the year. Mark Henry landing on the neck of Jericho, who was draped over the bottom rope, and tumbling to the arena floor might have been the most dangerous. Hulk Hogan gave the most emotional promo of his career when he tried to announce his retirement. Vince McMahon had other plans.

Velocity (TNN): 1.1

Confidential (TNN): 1.3

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 1.0

Week beginning May 27

Raw (TNN): 3.7

Analysis: Brock Lesnar, with the help of Paul Heyman, scored his biggest win yet by defeating Buh Buh Ray Dudley. Goldust continued to do some of the most entertaining work of his career, this time by masquerading as an NWO member. The Big Show halted Bradshaw's push by pinning him with a choke-slam in less than two minutes. Rob Van Dam's I-C title victory over Eddie Guerrero in a ladder match turned out to be must-see TV.

Smackdown (UPN): 3.3

Analysis: Chris Jericho continues to use 1980s tactics to maximum effectiveness. He threw Faarooq into an exposed turnbuckle, then used a Rocker dropper for the win. Randy Orton mounted some impressive flurries against WWE World champion The Undertaker, but still lost. Hulk Hogan helped Edge beat Kurt Angle in an outstanding steel cage main event. Like *Raw*, however, *Smackdown* dropped into the ratings danger zone this week.

Velocity (TNN): 0.9

Confidential (TNN): 1.3

Sunday Night Heat (MTV): 1.0

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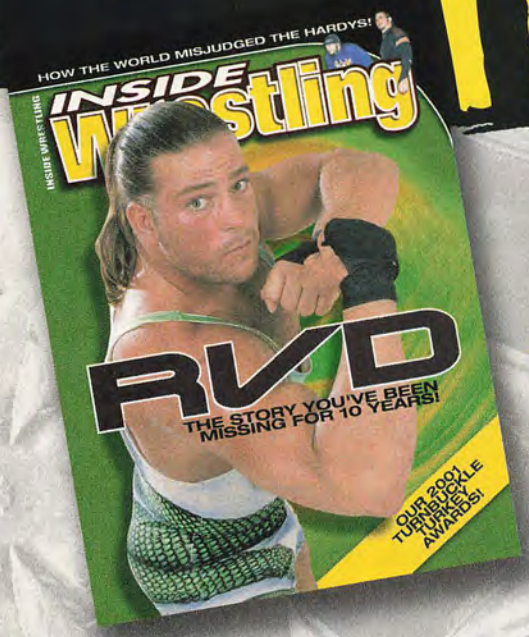
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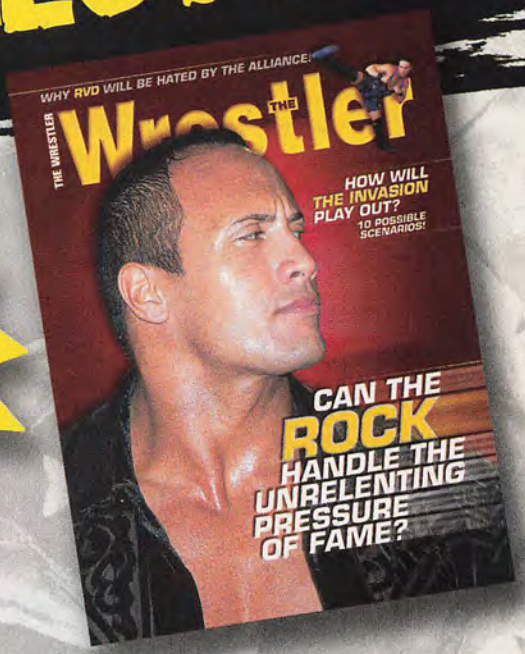
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A0802R

the steel cage

By Liz Hunter

IS SHAWN WRONG? I was surprised as anyone when Kevin Nash made his special announcement regarding the New World Order and introduced none other than former WWF World champion Shawn Michaels as the group's new member. Even more surprising, Michaels made his return to the company after a four-year absence (I'm not counting his inactive stints as commissioner) and didn't have the opportunity to address the crowd. He did a few boy toy dance moves, wiggled his butt, posed, and gave his old bodyguard a leaping high-five. And he did all of this while wearing an NWO T-shirt.

Michaels couldn't have made a more understated return to WWE when, in fact, it should have been one of the most heralded events of 2002. Even the NWO, which didn't even have its roots as a unit in WWE, had the benefit of short promos before its entry into the company. Just a couple of days earlier, *Confidential* aired an interview with the former champ, who claimed he was enjoying life as Shawn Hickenbottom (real last name) and said that Shawn Michaels couldn't be more dead. He even cited his newfound religious convictions as a reason to stay home with his family.

Shawn Michaels is certainly not in his physical prime as a wrestler, as he was when this picture was taken, but if he was going to return for one more run in WWE, was it smart to put him in the NWO, a group that already has an established leader in Kevin Nash?

If that interview was a swerve, it was a tacky one. Rumors have circulated that Michaels, after three years of rehabilitation, wants one more active run in WWE. But is joining the NWO the way to do it? When Lilian Garcia introduced Nash for the announcement, she introduced him as the "leader" of the NWO. That undercut the stature of Michaels, who was introduced only a couple of minutes later. Will Michaels be a Nash underling, as Michaels treated Nash several years ago? Is Michaels being treated as no bigger a star than X-Pac, The Big Show, or Booker T?

The current NWO crew makes the NWO black and white of Stevie Ray, Brian Adams, and Scott Norton seem competent. Is Michaels the instrument to return the NWO to its former glory? Or is he considered an unreliable employee who can be easily shoved through the revolving door like Scott Hall?

Frankly, I don't like Michaels' chances.

RETIRE THE I-C AND EUROPEAN BELTS. Regular *PWI* readers understand that no one (save for Matt Brock) respects tradition more than me. In this age of 10-second clips and MTV-style production values, championships are the only true links to wrestling's great heritage.

We've already seen the demise of the WCW World heavyweight, World tag team, and U.S. heavyweight titles during the past year. In light of the brand extension and the World Wrestling Federation's transformation into World Wrestling Entertainment, I propose a revamping of the title landscape. Retire the Intercontinental and European championships. The Intercontinental title has little significance today. Holding that belt doesn't qualify a wrestler for a shot at the World title, and it isn't defended on *Smackdown* at all. And, of course, the European title is rarely defended in Europe.

I suggest that WWE institute *Raw* and *Smackdown* singles championships. As regional titles accurately represented wrestling's territories in the past, champions of *Raw* and *Smackdown* would be more relevant in today's television age. We would know exactly what the *Raw* champion and the *Smackdown* champion represent. I never understood what an Intercontinental champion was supposed to be anyway. It has always sounded like an airline to me.

ADVICE TO NWA-TNA. Ironically, the last remnant of wrestling tradition will

A.J Styles (shown tying up Xavier) is one of the young stars who will be featured prominently in the new NWA-TNA promotion this summer. Liz Hunter hopes the Jarrett family will resist the temptation to turn each and every young star into a character.

probably be found in NWA-TNA, the upstart promotion operated by the Jarrett family. For those of you still not familiar with the new promotion, TNA is not T & A. It stands for Total Nonstop Action. With women such as Francine, Alicia (formerly Ryan Shamrock), Elektra, and Bobcat signed, you can expect to see some T & A on TNA, but I have to believe that a promotion run by Jerry Jarrett will emphasize wrestling over all else.

I just hope TNA is smart enough to avoid a common mistake made by World Wrestling All-Stars, the X Wrestling Federation, and so many independent promotions. Specifically, I'm referring to the belief that every wrestler must have a gimmick. Every WWE superstar can have one because that company has the luxury to recruit wrestlers with established gimmicks and to slowly develop characters for up-and-comers.

Vince McMahon's WWF was the first to insist that every wrestler have entrance music and a marketable persona. I recall that regional promotions did fine with plain wrestlers such as Bob Backlund, Harley Race, and Verne Gagne. Fans could identify with ordinary wrestlers more easily. In fact, having a number of ordinary-looking wrestlers made stars such as Dusty Rhodes, The Assassins, and Austin Idol that much more effective.

In other words, don't give A.J. Styles a mask and cape and call him The Tornado. Allow him to be a normal Southern boy with a wealth of wrestling skill. It will make potential regulars such as Randy Savage and Konnan seem more colorful—and TNA will be more credible.

(Liz Hunter can be reached via e-mail at SuperstarLizH@yahoo.com.) □

strange list of the month

FIVE WAYS GOLDUST CAN APPEAL TO BOOKER T

1. Rekindle some Harlem Heat by calling Booker a "fruit booty"
2. Masquerade as The Rock and let Booker give him the Book-end
3. Find that Halle Berry look-alike again
4. Have a nice, hot Swanson Hungry Man dinner waiting after his next match
5. Wear camouflage and appear as G.I. Bro

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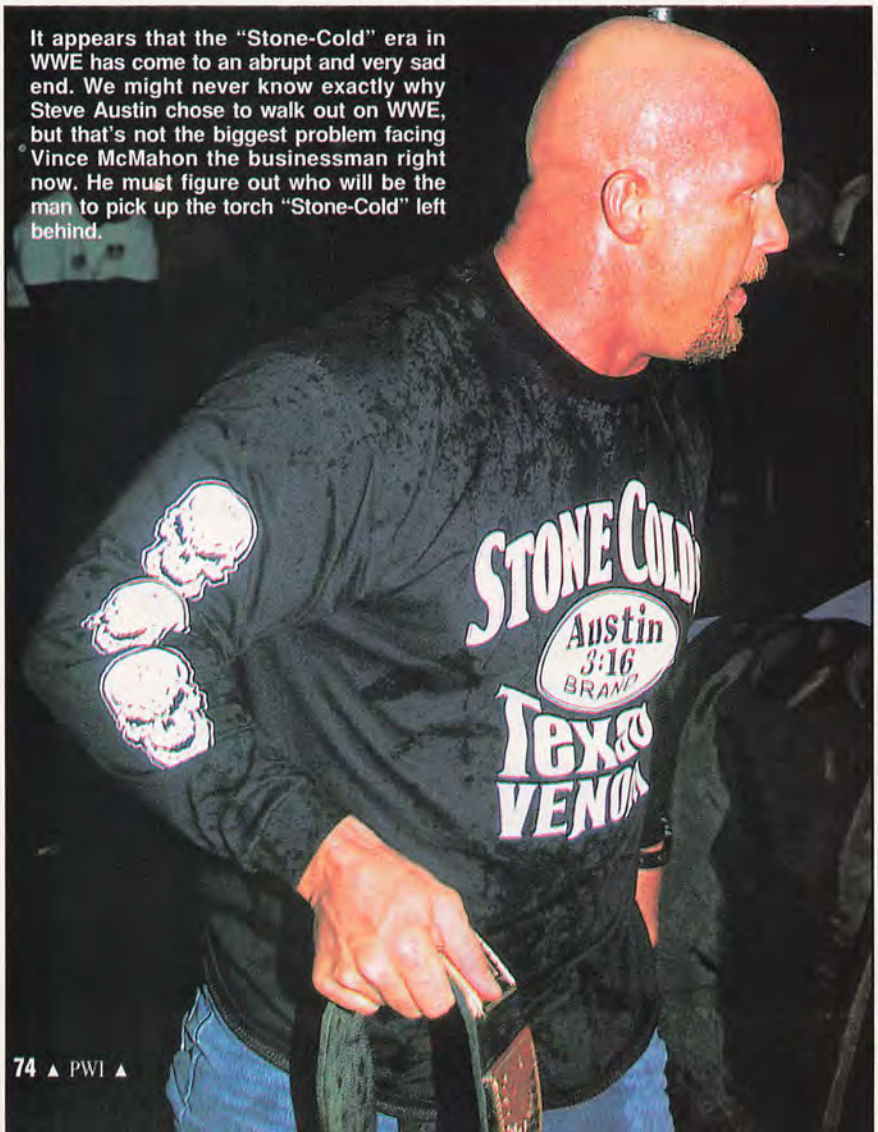
win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

STEVE AUSTIN WALKING out of WWE has upset the fans, Vince McMahon, and no doubt *Raw's* creative team. Ratings for all WWE programs have been slipping lately, but *Raw's* numbers had remained (for the most part) the most reliable, due in large part to the star power of Austin and his ongoing feud with Ric Flair. Austin defeated Flair in his last televised match, with a stipulation that the loser would have to be the winner's personal assistant.

But we never got the chance to see Flair scrubbing Austin's toilets or buying him a six-pack at the local convenience store. Problems became evident when Austin stormed out of the company the day following WrestleMania X8. "Stone-Cold" had to be unhappy that he had been placed in a grudge match against Scott Hall, which was clearly less significant than The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan and Triple-H vs. Chris Jericho. Austin bitterly complained about "creative" in a rare *Byte This!* interview on wwe.com. That was a prelude to his second departure, which occurred on June 10.



It appears that the "Stone-Cold" era in WWE has come to an abrupt and very sad end. We might never know exactly why Steve Austin chose to walk out on WWE, but that's not the biggest problem facing Vince McMahon the businessman right now. He must figure out who will be the man to pick up the torch "Stone-Cold" left behind.

Frankly, I don't understand why Austin is angry with the creative team. He was involved in the most entertaining storyline on either *Raw* or *Smackdown.* He was in a feud with Ric Flair, who can still deliver a solid match. Austin shouldn't have been worried about the "Nature Boy" stealing his spot. And, as the undisputed star of *Raw,* he didn't have to compete with *Smackdown's* Rock, Triple-H, or Hulk Hogan.

I can more easily understand why Austin would be burned out. He's probably sick of WWE, tired of dealing with the same people for seven years now, and wondering why being a multimillionaire isn't making his life that much more enjoyable than it was 10 years ago. His domestic problems and, it seems, his chronic bad temper indicate that a much-needed—and much-deserved—hiatus is necessary. There's more to life than WWE, and Austin is probably wondering why he has made it his *entire* life.

Austin carried WWE all by himself for more than two years. It wasn't until The Rock and Triple-H became main-eventers in 1998 and 1999 that "Stone-Cold" was relieved of at least some of the burden. But the pressure simply took on new dimensions. Instead of being responsible for helping the WWF fend off WCW, Austin had to face the internal competition of the emerging Rock and Triple-H. WrestleMania X8 demonstrated how much ground Austin has lost.

Historically speaking, I consider Austin one of WWE's "torch carriers." There are so few in this exclusive club that I can easily list them here: Bruno Sammartino, Bob Backlund, Hulk Hogan, Bret Hart, and Steve Austin.

Why do I narrow the torch carriers down to these five? Why not Pedro Morales, Randy Savage, The Ultimate Warrior, Shawn Michaels, The Rock, Triple-H, or Kurt Angle? All of

those are important wrestlers in WWE history, but none of them has had to assume a leadership role without the safety net of a popular icon lurking in the background. WWE has been forced to reinvent itself five times in its history, almost out of generational necessity. Sammartino, Backlund, Hogan, Hart, and Austin are the five men who emerged to lead the company through those changing times.

In most of these cases, these men didn't even have a torch handed to them, and if they did, it was already snuffed out.

Bruno Sammartino: How could this Italian weightlifter possibly have as much credibility as NWA World champion Lou Thesz or AWA World champion Verne Gagne? After all, Thesz and Gagne were hailed as amateur standouts and "hookers." Sammartino couldn't tie his challengers in knots like those other champions. Instead, Sammartino molded a new kind of champion, one that was willing to punch and stomp, just like the guys in the neighborhood. He capitalized on New York City's ethnic fervor to become a blue-collar champion. That was something that really hadn't been done before.

Bob Backlund: During the first three years of Backlund's time as champion, Sammartino continued to be a special attraction in the WWF. He was like an insurance policy, just in case Backlund was a failure. But after Sammartino defeated George Steele in his heavily hyped final match in 1981, it was impossible for "Da Brune" to hold the title again. The entire burden was on Backlund. Strangely enough, he took the WWF back in time to be a Thesz/Gagne type champion. Backlund didn't lead the WWF to a new zenith, but he did a respectable job of keeping it a moneymaking enterprise with his no nonsense approach.

Hulk Hogan: Vince McMahon Jr. grabbed the WWF and shook it like an Etch-A-Sketch. He wanted a cartoonish superhero and sports entertainment. The charismatic Hogan gave him both. Rick Steamboat once said that McMahon could have taken anyone in Hogan's position and made him a hero, and that Terry Bollea just happened to be the person occupying that role. But that might not be true. Aside from the steroid scandal of the early-1990s, Hogan did not fall from grace like so many other athletes. He handled his high-profile role in a responsible manner. Hogan led the WWF into an exciting, yet risky new world.

Bret Hart: He won the WWF title while Hogan was pursuing an acting career, but the "Hulkster" remained only one phone call away from Vince McMahon. Indeed, McMahon picked up the phone in 1993, resulting in Hogan invading WrestleMania IX and brushing aside Hart to defeat Yokozuna for the championship. When Hogan signed with WCW in 1994, however, McMahon had no choice but to invest heavily in Hart. The "Hitman" carried himself as a serious champion who seemed above the cartoonish fray that Hogan left behind. Like Backlund, Hart didn't launch another wrestling boom, yet did his best in a tough situation.

Rob Van Dam might be the man who does a lot to reinvent WWE and lead the company into another exciting and very profitable new era ... or he might not be. The man who does it might not even be on the main WWE roster right now.

Steve Austin: The WWF was in the most serious jeopardy in its history. WCW threatened to run the company out of business. A desperate McMahon sensed the fans' attraction to this crude anti-hero, and he launched the "Attitude" marketing campaign that helped the WWF not only survive, but also overtake and finally swallow up WCW. With all due respect, neither The Rock nor Triple-H made that possible. It was "The Texas Rattlesnake."

Who has the torch now? Actually, Austin left it behind for someone to pick up. "Stone-Cold" might return to reclaim it someday, or a new star—possibly Rob Van Dam, Brock Lesnar, or Randy Orton—will grab that torch and reinvigorate WWE. I don't think The Rock or Triple-H is capable of carrying that torch because both are forever intertwined in the "Stone-Cold" era, and Rock won't be around full-time from here on anyway. If Austin doesn't return, McMahon must prepare a new superstar to reinvent WWE yet again.

(Harry Burkett can be reached via e-mail at HBurkettJr@excite.com.) □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

IT WASN'T A flawless kickoff by any means.

The man inducting George Hackenschmidt was unable to pronounce "The Russian Lion's" last name. Ida Mae Martinez' personal remembrance of Sky Low Low didn't quite tug at the old heartstrings ("I once helped him across the street in Montreal, I believe," Martinez struggled to recall). And legendary wrestlers George "The Animal" Steele, Ox Baker, and Killer Kowalski were never given an opportunity to speak, while former ring announcer Gary Michael Cappetta had about an hour to put himself over and take shots at the McMahon family.

And no-shows by Bruno Sammartino and Rick Steamboat—the Hall's only living inductees—seemed to cast a dark shadow over the proceedings, as did the death of Lou Thesz only one week earlier.

Yet it was a kickoff nonetheless, and the Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame is now a reality in Schenectady, New York—for the time being at least. The fact that it has come this far is an impressive accomplishment in itself.

On May 5, 2002, the Board of Directors of the Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame gathered to induct 13 wrestlers: Hackenschmidt, Sammartino, Steamboat, Thesz, "Gorgeous" George Wagner, Mildred Burke, Sky Low Low, Andre the Giant, Ed "Strangler" Lewis, Jim Londos, Frank Gotch, Joe Stecher, and Buddy Rogers.

The induction ceremony was the final event of the Hall of Fame weekend that also included a card and memorabilia show and a dinner with the legends of wrestling. The dinner featured a chili cook-off between Ox Baker and Butcher Vachon that remarkably (and unfortunately) didn't end in Cappetta wearing a pot of chili in his lap.

According to its official mission statement, the purpose of the PWHF is as follows: "To maintain organized volunteerism that preserves and promotes the dignified history of professional wrestling. Our purpose is to enshrine and pay tribute to professional wrestlers who have advanced this national pastime in terms of athletics and entertainment ... (We) will acquire and maintain records, memorabilia, and artifacts related to professional wrestling. These enterprises will advance the legacy of the sport of professional wrestling, and give due credit and commemoration to those who have contributed to its greatness."

The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame induction ceremony shared the marquee with Debbie Reynolds and *Blues Clues* during the first weekend of May. Dan Murphy was impressed by a lot of what he saw on Hall of Fame weekend. He really likes the fact that this Hall of Fame is making an effort to get fans to appreciate the sport's past.

That's certainly a lofty aspiration and a commendable goal. The $10-million question is, "Can it work?"

First of all, can the Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame attract a comparable number of visitors as the Baseball Hall of Fame or the Boxing Hall of Fame, both of which are located less than two hours from Schenectady?

It seems very unlikely.

Unlike those sports, in which history and tradition are venerated, pro wrestling tends to devour its own past. Wrestling fans aren't encouraged to have long memories. The promoters want the fans to concentrate

solely on the present—that's where they make their money. Nostalgia doesn't increase PPV buy rates.

In Schenectady, George "The Animal" Steele drew the loudest cheers of recognition from the fans assembled in Proctor's Theater for the induction ceremony. Killer Kowalski drew a smattering of applause.

Ox Baker attracted attention simply because of his unusual look; I doubt that many attendees knew who he was. As the Board inducted legends from the more distant past, like Hackenschmidt, Joe Stecher, Buddy Rogers, and Jim Londos, fans clapped politely, though it seemed few had any inkling who those guys were.

It's not the fans' fault. Most have never been exposed to the rich history of pro wrestling. In light of that, how can the PWHF educate them and draw them to Schenectady to support the Hall?

Secondly, how will fans discover and embrace the PWHF without the backing of WWE? Vince McMahon briefly considered supporting the Hall, but later backed away. In the end, PWHF's negotiations with McMahon may have done more harm than good, as Sammartino then declared he didn't wish to be affiliated with any organization that would talk turkey with Evil King Vince. Now the PWHF is in tricky territory. Without McMahon's blessing, it is unable to use WWE-trademarked names and will not receive publicity from the WWE media machine. On top of that, Sammartino is running down the Hall to anyone that will listen, and Bruno's word still carries some weight with the Hall's target audience.

It's also not a very promising sign when only a handful of legends show for the gala induction ceremony. In addition to Steele, Kowalski, Martinez, and Baker, I spotted Johnny Rodz, Cousin Luke (one of the PWHF organizers), Irish Davey O'Hannon, and a couple of indy guys. I'm sure I'm forgetting someone (I believe a Doink was in the house somewhere), but still, it's a pretty paltry turnout any way you cut it.

Representatives from the esteemed Cauliflower Alley Club were on hand to lend the proceedings some credibility, and about 400 fans turned out to see the legends of the game enshrined. Nonetheless, you couldn't shake the feeling that everyone privately had doubts about the PWHF's chances for survival.

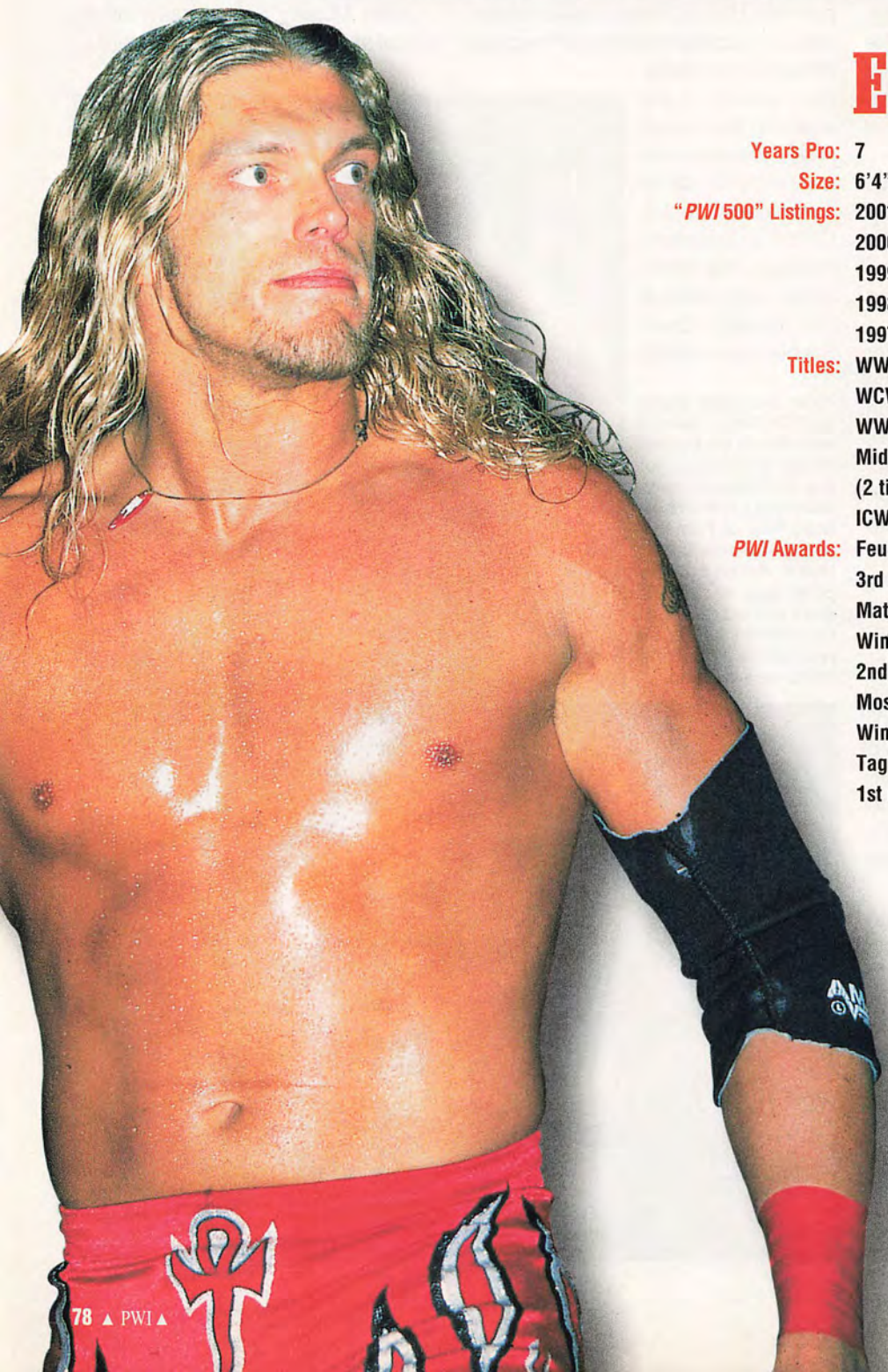
The highlight of the ceremony turned out to be a passionate speech by O'Hannon, who strongly urged those assembled to continue to support the Hall of Fame and to recognize the accomplishments of the great athletes and showmen who built pro wrestling from a carnival sideshow into a multibillion-dollar worldwide industry. O'Hannon's speech marked the emotional high point of the event. Even Steele was visibly moved by his remarks and made sure to shake his hand as O'Hannon returned to his seat. I'm not sure, but I think "The Animal" had a tear in his eye.

So far, the PWHF is moving by baby steps, but those baby steps are in the right direction. This could be a great opportunity for wrestling fans everywhere, if the Hall receives enough support from the wrestling community. I sincerely hope it does.

(Dan Murphy can be reached via e-mail at irishdan@concentric.net.) □

Killer Kowalski (right) and Ox Baker (below) were two of the biggest names to show up for the first induction ceremonies at the Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame. It was unfortunate that there weren't many other stars of the past there and probably just as unfortunate that no representatives from WWE were on hand.

THE Wrestling ANALYST



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	Most Improved:
	Winner (2001)
	Tag Team of the Year:
	1st runner-up (2000)

THE NUMBERS

Offense (9.5): Edge's blossoming and expanded offense over the past couple of years is the key to his current success and, if it happens, will have been responsible for his ascension to main-event status. Edge's spear is more awesome than Bill Goldberg's. How is that possible? Unlike Goldberg, Edge doesn't use it regularly as part of a finishing combination, but more as a weapon to turn a match's momentum.

Defense (7.5): This remains Edge's weak point. Edge has displayed surprisingly few counterwrestling skills—only a sadist's capacity to take punishment, then get angry and make a comeback. That might be the result of his training with Sweet Daddy Siki, who was best known as a brawler, or the fact that the latest generation of WWE superstars focus on the "go, go, go" style of wrestling.

Experience (8.5): Edge is finally beginning to be recognized as a WWE veteran by the locker room and the fans. Yet he never competed in WCW or ECW. Stars such as Chris Jericho, Tajiri, and Chris Benoit have the benefit of extensive international experience. Edge does not. Commuting between Toronto and Detroit doesn't count here.

Conditioning (9.5): As long as Edge's knees and ankles remain healthy, there is no point in him bulking up to keep pace with other WWE superstars. Edge's considerable strength, combined with his above-average speed and agility, will give him a unique arsenal against fellow heavyweights. One could wash clothes on his abdominal muscles.

Science (8.5): He learned the basics from Siki and Toronto-based promoter Ron Hutchison. While those fundamentals are grounded in mat science, wrestlers tend to abandon them quickly in the fast-paced WWE. The success of Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, Brock Lesnar, and others might just signal a return to more traditional grappling. Edge would have to adapt if that happened.

Stamina (9.5): Considering how WWE expects full-throttle performances in pay-per-view main events, Edge's stamina will put him in good stead with management. His recent matches have dispelled any notions that Edge overly depended on Christian for the quick tag. Edge's series of bouts against Kurt Angle has proven that he is main-event caliber.

Power (8.5): Edge was criticized for not fully utilizing his power against light heavyweights during tag team matches in the past. Our advice to Edge: Don't start now. As a singles star, Edge must contend with athletes of phenomenal strength, including The Undertaker, Triple-H, and Mark Henry. Edge is smart enough not to start playing a power game now.

Speed (9.0): His speed hasn't increased since he was placed under the microscope in the September 2000 issue of *The Wrestling Analyst,* but his quickness is more effective today. The influence of Christian and The Hardy Boyz has led Edge to wrestle like a cruiserweight when the situation calls for it. That will continue to be a major benefit against *Smackdown's* top tier.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (10.0): Edge isn't grizzled with scars like Triple-H, missing teeth like Mick Foley, or just plain mean like The Undertaker. Yet his TLC tag team matches at SummerSlam 2000 and WrestleMania X-Seven were incredible because of their brutality—as was his steel cage encounter with Kurt Angle at the May 28 *Smackdown* taping. He's very tough.

Quality Of Opposition (9.5): Edge now seems to belong in the ring with a superstar like Kurt Angle, as opposed to his I-C title feud with Jeff Jarrett in 1999. Unfortunately, Edge can no longer aspire to the Intercontinental or European titles, which are based on *Raw.* Despite that fact, the brand extension has resulted in greater competition for Edge, and he might be better off wrestling for the brand in which he can only shoot for the biggest prize.

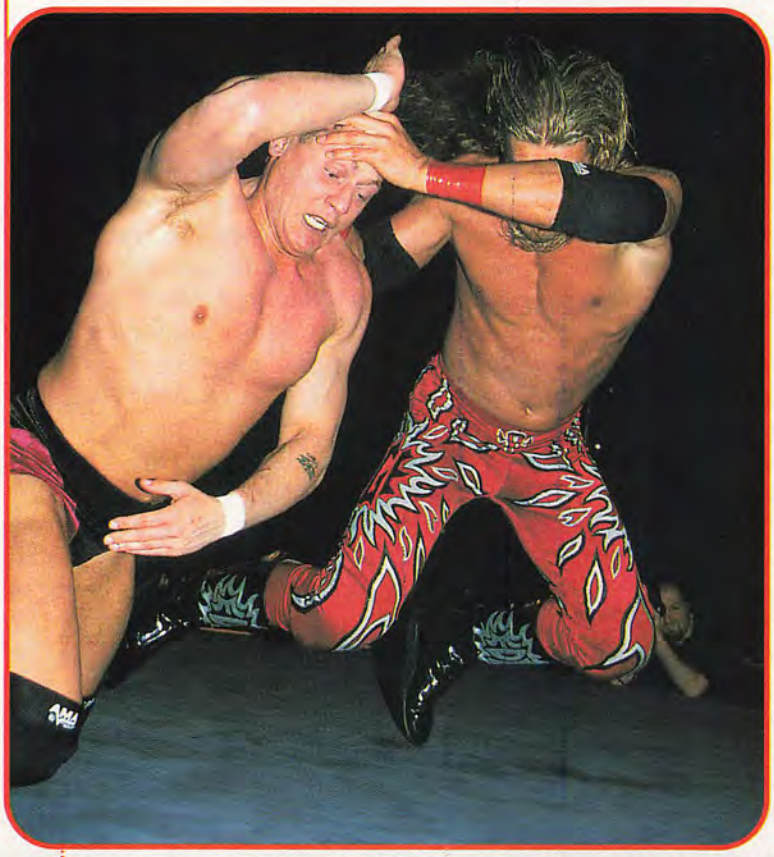
① **For at least the last year, people wondered what it would take for Edge to make significant strides toward main-event status. It took a great series of matches with Kurt Angle this spring, one in which the Canadian star more than held his own. He was magnificent even in most of those matches he lost to the former Olympian.**

② Edge doesn't go to the air too often these days, although he is quite capable of executing a number of high-flying moves, such as the flying bodypress he is using on Test. He might want to make greater use of his aerial skills as he starts wrestling bigger and more powerful men more often.

③ After splitting with Christian, Edge seemed happy for a while to take matches against whichever wrestlers were put across the ring from him, even if they were mid-carders such as Big Bossman and Goldust. Now that he has had a chance to wrestle some main-eventers, expect him to be more aggressive when it comes to pursuing the bouts he really wants.

THE ANALYSIS

Repertoire: Although Edge wasn't trained in Japan or Mexico, his basic knowledge of Mexican and Japanese holds gives the illusion that he has spent a fair amount of time in those countries. But those moves, including huracanranas and moonsaults, have been so integrated into the American style that they aren't considered special anymore. He also needs a finisher more dramatic than the Edge-a-cution.



④ **Edge didn't fare particularly well in his feud with William Regal early this year, but he did learn a lot from wrestling him. He learned that he wrestles best when he is angry or, you might say, when he has a certain edginess to him. He also got some lessons in technical wrestling and was able to work a bit on his underdeveloped counterwrestling skills.**

Strengths: Edge has intentionally put himself on a distinct career track. While Edge doesn't have the benefit of having competed in WCW or ECW, it can also be argued that he didn't waste any time with those companies. He entered the WWF at the mid-card level and his career has progressed since that point. In fact, Edge has said his journey to superstardom should consist of small, steady steps, not an overnight leap.

Weaknesses: What is an "Edge"? Is it a post-1980s rocker, a brooding Gothic figure, or a wisecracking egomaniac? It's ironic that now, at the time of his greatest push, his persona is more generic than ever. He's just a popular guy with nice hair. Edge has fallen into the same trap as Chris Jericho fell into a year ago. Perhaps, like Jericho, Edge should turn heel to flesh out his character. That should happen sooner than later.

Defining Career Moment: It should have been his 2001 King of the Ring victory over Kurt Angle, but Shane McMahon's interference stunted his momentum. Instead, it was his hair vs. hair victory over Angle at Judgment Day 2002. But that, too, was marred just a bit a couple of weeks later when Angle beat Edge fairly in a steel cage while the referee was knocked down. Hulk Hogan's subsequent interference (he tossed Angle back into the cage) didn't help Edge's credibility.

Future: Like Billy Gunn, Edge failed to parlay his King of the Ring win and Intercontinental title reigns into main-event success. But Edge's career proves that only great matches against higher-tier opponents can make superstars. *Smackdown* mid-carders such as Christian, Test, and Billy Kidman are probably begging for matches against Kurt Angle. Soon they might be begging for matches against Edge.

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ringside

(Continued from page 13)

fered a torn ACL, which is why you haven't seen her on WWE TV in recent months. She should make a full recovery within a few more months ... Also on the injury front, **Scotty Too Hotty's** neck surgery reportedly went well. Look for him to return to the ring in about a year ... Word has it that former WWF and WCW writer **Vince Russo** is working on a book about his time in the WWF. One of two things could happen there: Vince McMahon will hire Russo back before that book sees the light of day, or we'll have one interesting tell-all headed our way.

Former WWF World champion **Bruno Sammartino** was recently inducted into the Wrestling Hall of Fame in Schenectady, New York, but he refused to attend the induction ceremony. "Wrestling is how I made my living and supported my family, but it's over," Sammartino told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. "I don't want anything to do with it anymore." It's sad to think that one of wrestling's greatest champions ever no longer wishes to have anything to do with the sport.

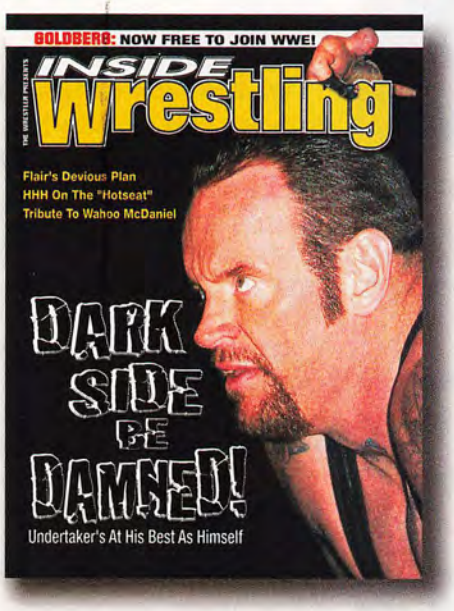
Former ECW World tag team champion **Nova** defeated **The Prototype** to capture the OVW heavyweight title in his first match in the promotion this spring. Nova is now under a WWE developmental contract and is drawing excellent reviews from both WWE and OVW officials ... Here's a little plug for one *PWI* column that some of you might overlook. Check out WWE tour results in "Arena Reports." I think you'll be surprised by the number of hardcore title changes that are taking place on the house show circuit ... **Joey Styles** is back behind the microphone. The former voice of ECW will be doing the play-by-play for Major League Wrestling, yet another indy promotion emanating from Philadelphia's Viking Hall, the old ECW Arena.

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. ☐

Vince Russo says he has a book about his experiences in the WWF in the works. It'll be interesting to read his thoughts on Jim Ross (among so many others) if said book ever sees print.

this month in...

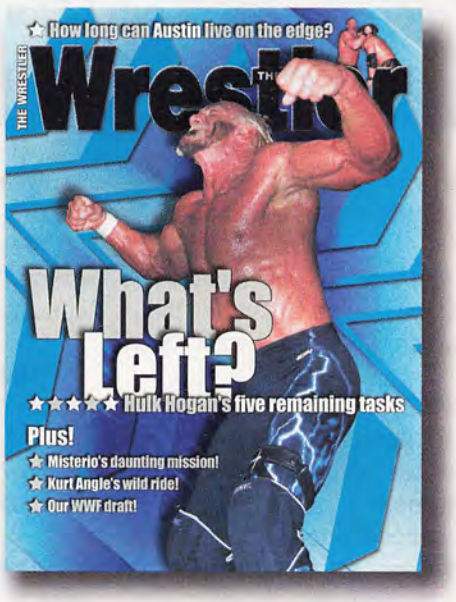
INSIDE Wrestling®


GOLDBERG: NOW FREE TO JOIN WWE!
INSIDE Wrestling
Flair's Devious Plan
HHH On The "Hotseat"
Tribute To Wahoo McDaniel
DARK SIDE BE DAMNED!
Undertaker's At His Best As Himself

THE UNDERTAKER must have heard all the talk a year or so ago. He was way past his prime. He was holding down good young stars. His redneck biker gimmick was awful. He needed to "die" again. Now look at him. He's one of WWE's MVPs—and he's doing it as himself! ... **BILL GOLDBERG** officially became a free agent when he negotiated a buyout of his AOL Time Warner contact this spring. Where will he show up next? We'll tell you ... Is **THE ROCK** the only WWE star capable of making it in Hollywood? Hardly! We'll give you the names of 10 superstars who could follow him to Tinseltown!

All this—and much more—in the October 2002 issue of ***Inside Wrestling***

The Wrestler®



The **HULK HOGAN** comeback story has been nothing short of phenomenal! But now that he has come all the way back and won the undisputed WWE title, what's left? We have a list of five things he must do before he hangs up the red and yellow for good. He had better get started! ... **STEVE AUSTIN** loves to cross the boss! He lives for it! But we'll explain why he could be making the biggest mistake of his life by crossing his new boss, **RIC FLAIR**! ... WWE's historic brand extension draft was fascinating, but some things about it really stunk. We think you'll like seeing how *our* draft unfolded!

All this—and much more—in the September 2002 issue of ***The Wrestler***

You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just *have* to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd *never* think of asking

12 questions

FRANCINE

When did you first realize you were a pretty big star in this business?

The first time *PWI* used my photo in one of the issues. Other than that, I honestly don't know. I still don't know.

Which is a scarier proposition: taking a piledriver, or trying to get to your car after a show at the ECW Arena?

The second one, because have you ever seen some of the fans that came to the wrestling shows?

What do you miss least about ECW?

The dressing room at the ECW Arena. No light, no heat, and no air conditioning in the summer!

What was your first thought upon hearing the letters "NWA-TNA"?

How do I get a job with them? Who do I call?

What person, every time you look at him, makes you think, *How the hell did he ever get this far in life?*

Carrot Top. Just look at him. He's scary. I just don't understand the fascination. His face just looks like a crumpled up bag.

Who from Hollywood would you date?

Joe McIntyre from New Kids on the Block. I've loved him since 1990. He's still my favorite.

What person did you not want to meet, only to have that person be a lot better than you expected?

Scott Hall. Everyone always buries him, but when he came to ECW, he was nice and great to work with.

What is the scariest town to be alone in?

Gary, Indiana. Hell, they gave us Michael Jackson, so it has to be scary.

What's the strangest thing you've ever sold on eBay?

The time I tried to sell a date with me on there. The bidding got up to more than $13,000, but the requests from the bidders were so perverted that I had to remove it. It started out innocently, but it evolved into something bad. I'll stick to selling my clothes.

What's your favorite non-alcoholic beverage?

I really have an infatuation with Cherry Coke, and I don't know why.

You have a choice between Marv Albert, Mae Young, and Jim Hellwig to live with on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Which would you choose and why?

Marv Albert, because I like to be bitten.

You have a hammer, midget, and a roulette wheel. What are your plans for the evening?

Is he a nice midget? *[Editor's note: not really.]* Then I would tie him to the roulette wheel, spin it, and beat him with the hammer until he got the message.

for the guys...

Photo by Mark W. Hill

JASMIN ST. CLAIRE

BEST FEATURE...

Her gorgeous brown eyes

WHAT GUY WOULDN'T LIKE TO SEE HER DRESSED UP AS...

A candy striper or a nurse. Imagine getting a sponge bath from her!

FACE IT, MEN CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF...

Her fun-loving personality. She really enjoys what she does, and it shows

BUT WATCH OUT FOR THAT...

Wrestling ability. She's not just another catfighting diva. She knows what she's doing inside a ring and won't just be out to protect her beautiful body

SHE'D BE GREAT IN THIS TV OR MOVIE PART...

An ingenue in any soap opera, perhaps *All My Children*

IF SHE WEREN'T INVOLVED IN WRESTLING, WE COULD SEE HER SUCCEEDING AS...

A kickboxer

ONE THING SHE COULD STAND TO IMPROVE UPON IS...

Her, *um,* exposure. By that we mean she hasn't gotten enough opportunities to show everything she can do as a wrestler. She isn't just eye candy

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT...

She was trained for a career in wrestling by Susan Sexton and by a member of one of the industry's most respected families, Mando Guerrero

OVERHEARD AT RINGSIDE...

"I never thought I'd say it, but I wish I could trade places with The Blue Meanie!"

for the ladies...

ROB CONWAY

BEST FEATURE ...

His chiseled torso. What woman wouldn't love to do laundry ... as long as she could use his abs as the washboard!

WHAT WOMAN WOULDN'T LIKE TO SEE HIM DRESSED UP IN ...

A pile of suds. Hey, using him as a washboard would lather him up nicely

FACE IT, WOMEN CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF ...

His smile. It could melt even the most hardened of hearts

BUT WATCH OUT FOR THAT ...

Saucy side. This Ohio Valley Wrestling standout is a natural heel, and it often shows through his white bread persona

HE'D BE GREAT IN THIS TV OR MOVIE PART ...

Dylan McKay on *Beverly Hills, 90210*

IF HE WEREN'T INVOLVED IN WRESTLING, WE COULD SEE HIM SUCCEEDING AS ...

The breakout star for a successful Continental Basketball Association team

ONE THING HE COULD STAND TO IMPROVE UPON IS ...

Character direction. He needs to realize that the ladies would scream for his calendar pinup looks even if he was a bad, bad boy

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT ...

He was the leading scorer on his high school basketball team

OVERHEARD AT RINGSIDE ...

"There's just so much of him to enjoy—I really don't know where to start!"

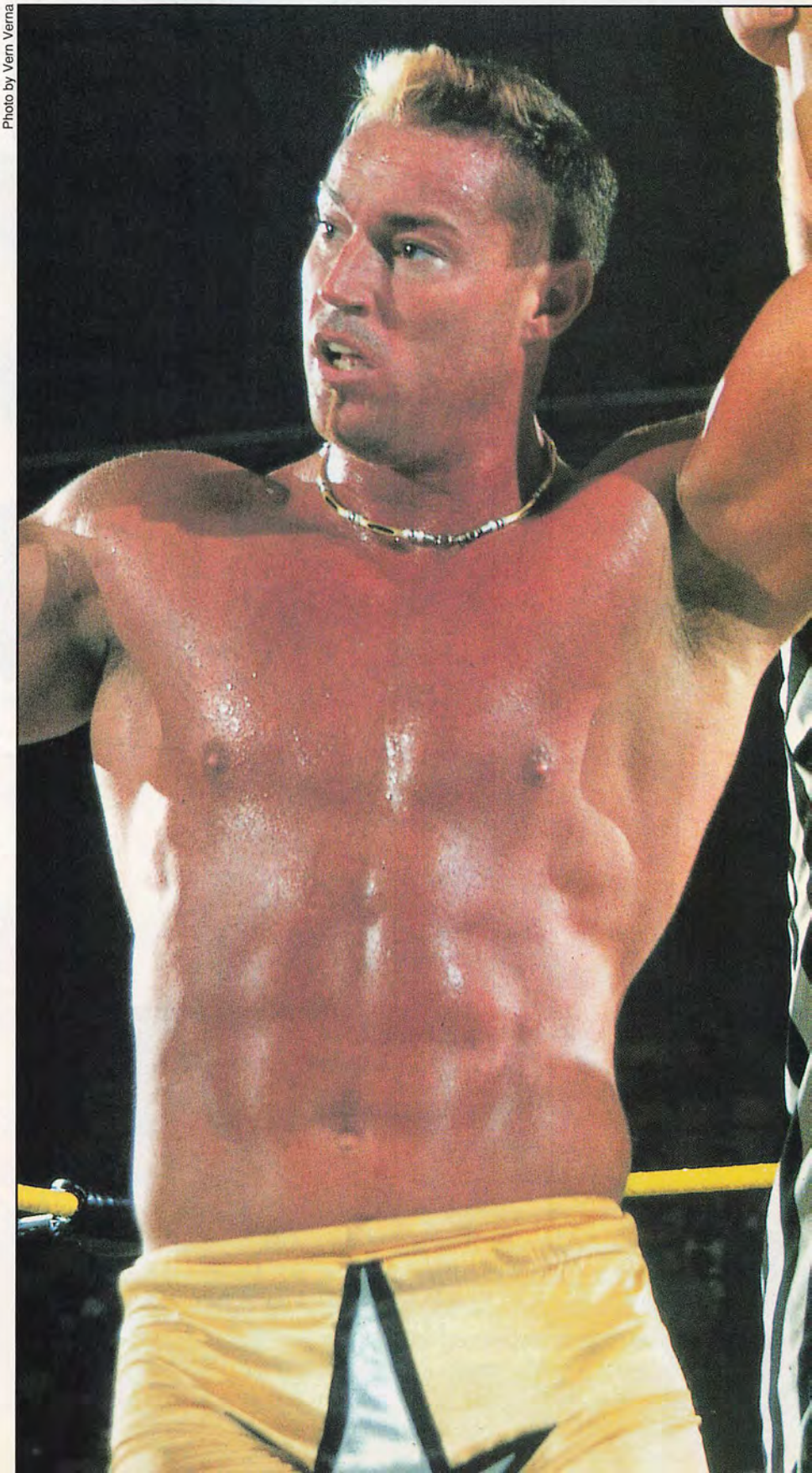
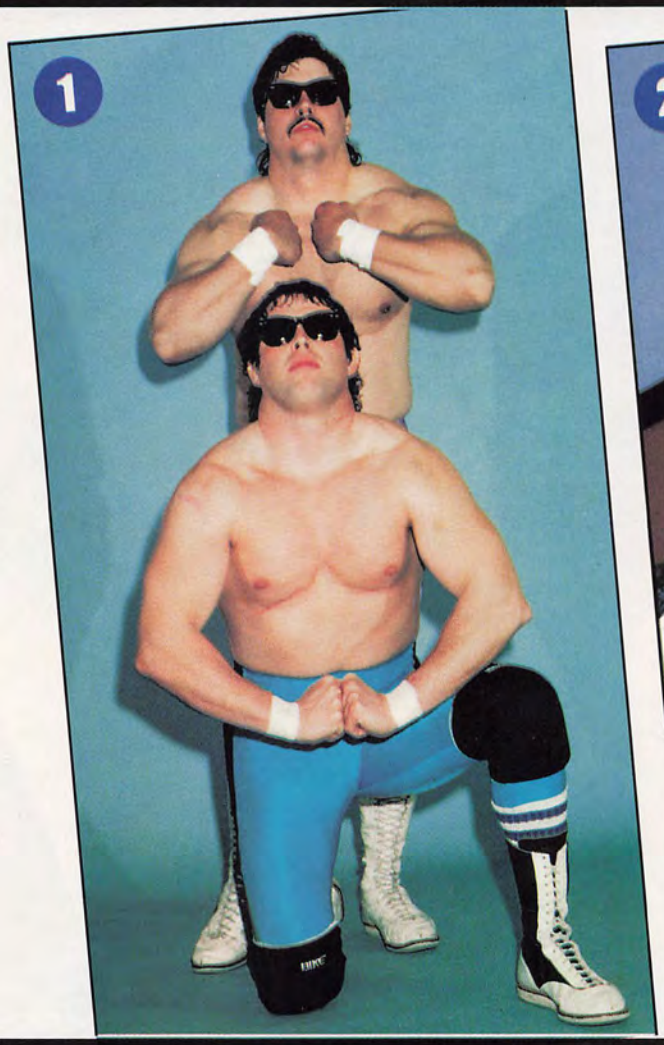
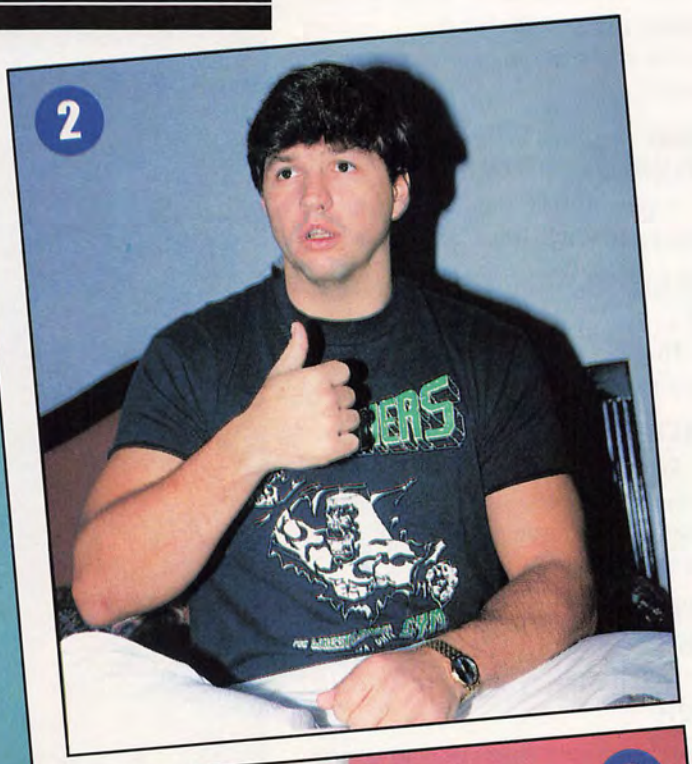


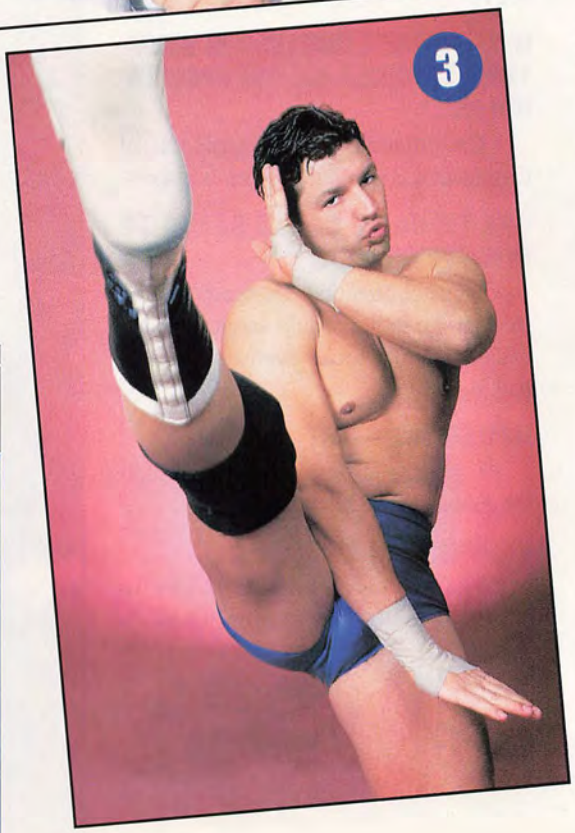
Photo by Vern Verna

It's amazing how drastically certain superstars change their looks over the years. A change in hair color or hairstyle here, a new ring outfit there, a few more tattoos here and there, or the mother of all changes ... the total gimmick overhaul. Every month, *PWI* will show you just how much one of your favorites has transformed himself. Yeah, it really is the same person in all these photos!

through the years







THE AL SNOW FILES

1—As one-half of The Sensationals with Mickey Doyle (1987)
2—Thumbs up to you, Al (1992)
3—Go ahead and get your kicks (1994)
4—That's Kane—as Unibomb—on the left (1995)
5—The New Rockers, Al—as Leif Cassidy—and Marty Jannetty (1996)
6—Chatting it up with Head (1998)
7—That Head Cheese team never got its due (2000)
8—Yup, it's Snow as a Mankind wannabe (2001)

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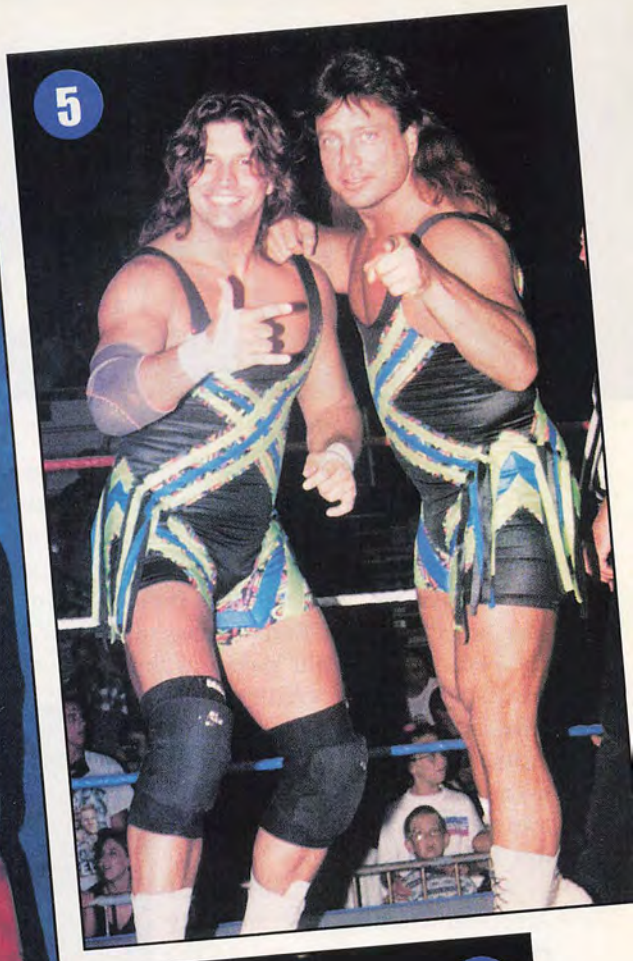
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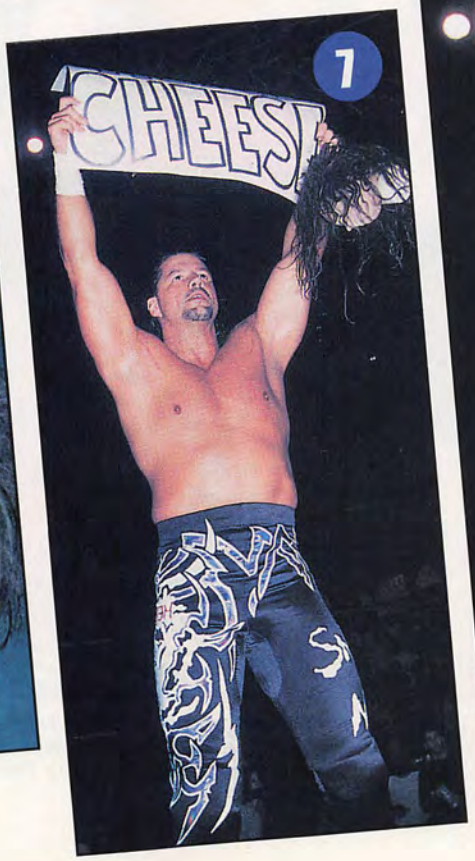

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the japan report

By Mike Spillane

THERE ARE SOME legacies that do not fade over time. In Japan, the legend of **Lou Thesz** has gone undiminished over the years, and not surprisingly, his death was front page news in the Far East. To fans of *puroresu,* Thesz is still known as the greatest professional wrestler of all-time, and there are few in the great pantheon of grappling legends that even come close to inspiring the awe and commanding the reverence that Thesz does.

While a high percentage of American wrestling fans can barely remember what happened on the last WWE pay-per-view, Japanese fans take the history of the sport very seriously. Thesz' legendary confrontations with **Rikidozan** from the 1950s were even replayed on Japanese television after the announcement of his death. Those bouts were a landmark not only in *puroresu,* but in the television industry as well. The staggering ratings numbers the Thesz-Rikidozan matches earned made wrestling a television sensation while breaking every existing record of that era, or any other.

Thanks to what seems like constant reincarnation, the legacy of **Tiger Mask** also remains intact. The fourth Tiger Mask has never been more popular and has eclipsed all his predecessors except for the original, the incomparable **Satoru Sayama**. New Japan Pro Wrestling, the promotion that was home to original Tiger Mask and the third incarnation, **Koji Kanemoto**, had **Tiger Mask IV** competing in the annual "Best Of The Super Junior" tournament at press time, in which he was slated to face, among others, the new **Black Tiger**, an age-old rival of all men who don the Tiger hood.

A recent New Japan show at the Tokyo Dome saw Tiger Mask IV and **Tiger Mask III** team for the first time, as Kanemoto reprised his masked alter-ego from the early-1990s. The two most recent Tiger Masks fought off **El Samurai** and the new Black Tiger in a back-and-forth tag team match. El Samurai and Black Tiger are not regular tag team partners, but matchmakers felt Samurai was an appropriate choice for the match because he was the man that faced Kanemoto in his debut as the third Tiger Mask. Using a variety of holds and moves inspired or borrowed directly from the original Tiger Mask, Tiger IV and Tiger III paid fast-paced tribute to Sayama and the legend of one of Japan's greatest masked heroes. In the end, the Tigers emerged victorious.

Tiger Mask IV has been carrying on the Tiger Mask legacy quite nicely. The latest man to assume the Tiger Mask identity recently teamed with the third man to do it, Koji Kanemoto.

On the same Dome show, a nod was given to two of *puroresu's* biggest stars of all-time when **Mitsuharu Misawa** and **Masa Chono** met for the very first time. Any meeting between these two superstars would have to be newsworthy because Misawa is a full-time star with Pro Wrestling NOAH, while Chono has spent his career as a top draw with New Japan. With an eye focused on their respective pasts, the two crafted a match that paid tribute to **Antonio Inoki** (New Japan founder) and **Giant Baba** (All-Japan founder, and the promoter who groomed Misawa for stardom). While fans were elated as the two heavyweight icons of Japanese wrestling tied up for the first time, there was also an underlying fervor for those that understood the subtext of the bout.

The war between All-Japan and New Japan has endured for decades and has always been a dividing line among *puroresu* fans. Giant Baba was All-Japan's top star for years, and Misawa filled that role as well before he left to form NOAH. Inoki became New Japan's top star, a position later filled by Masa Chono. Baba (now deceased) and Inoki (now retired) are icons of *puroresu,* and by using some of their trademark moves, Misawa and Chono paid tribute to their enduring legacies while delivering an exciting 30-minute time-limit draw that brought the Tokyo Dome crowd to its feet. □

the mexico report

By Mike Spillane

THE DEFENDING OF one's honor, hair, or mask is much more likely to be at the heart of heated Lucha Libre rivalries than any championship. However, one ongoing feud in AAA has begun to revolve around the rarely seen Mexican National heavyweight title. Sometimes regarded as an afterthought, in spite of its name, the National title had been firmly around the waist of Latin Lover, one of AAA's biggest stars, for several years.

But Latin Lover has spent the last year entangled in a convoluted feud with **Heavy Metal**, **Perro Aguayo Jr.**, and **Hector Garza**. In many of the matches that comprised this four-way rivalry, the National title wasn't even worthy of mention, and the champ only brought the belt to ringside on a semi-regular basis.

In his final title defense, Latin Lover dropped the Mexican National heavyweight title to reviled *rudo* Garza, suddenly placing the championship at center stage in this ongoing battle. In the spring, the two met in Monterrey for a rematch, which Garza won. Until recently, Garza had never used the feud as a means to garner title shots, but now that the strap has changed hands, all the men in this unusual war—Aguayo and Metal included—are vying to be next in line to face Garza for the gold.

Ultimo Dragon's globe-spanning Toryumon promotion has had success with an offshoot project called T2P, a group that adheres to a classic Lucha Libre philosophy. The in-ring style of Ultimo's newest proteges, not surprisingly, reminds many long-time fans of the same unique style blend Ultimo created when he arrived in Mexico fresh from training in Japan. Then known as **Yoshihiro Asai**, Dragon graduated from the New Japan Pro Wrestling dojo and ventured to Mexico to expand his repertoire. That's when he transformed into Ultimo Dragon and brought together the Mexican and Japanese wrestling styles. In the process, Dragon became an international sensation and has been a star in not only Japan and Mexico, but in the United States as well.

Although an arm injury forced Ultimo Dragon to retire from active competition years ago, he remains very active in the sport as a trainer/promoter. His Toryumon and T2P groups are drawing rave reviews from fans in Mexico.

One of Dragon's training centers is located just outside Mexico City, where he casts his students in a familiar mold. Employing a heavy dose of Lucha Libre mat technique, arrays of wild armdrags, and inventive submission holds, all the stars of T2P are capable fighters in any style, but they wrestle like classically trained Luchadores.

A recent trios match at Arena Mexico pointed out one of the more glaring problems in the Lucha Libre rule system. This EMLL card saw the very popular trio of **Mr. Niebla**, **El Hijo del Santo**, and **Negro Casas** take on **Los Infernales**—the team of **Ultimo Guerrero**, **Tarzan Boy**, and **Rey Bucanero**. The *technicos* seemed to have things well in hand, and since six-man tag matches in Mexico are usually officiated by two referees, there wasn't much room for the *rudos* to bend the rules. After Mr. Niebla used his signature hold, La Nieblina, to score a fall in the favor of the *technicos,* the *rudos* became noticeably frustrated. Heading into the final fall of the match, Ultimo Guerrero found a split-second opportunity to turn things around.

Guerrero removed his own mask and tossed it to opposing team captain Casas and proceeded to fall to the mat. When one of the referees turned his attention to them, he saw Guerrero flat on the mat covering his face, while Casas stood stunned, holding the mask. Because unmasking an opponent is cause for an instant disqualification, the referee surmised what appeared to be an unmasking and called for the bell, ruling in favor of the *rudos*. Especially given the proliferation of partial referees that tend to allow *rudos* to take liberties with the rules, a new system of evaluating disqualification scenarios seems to be in order. While this rule is a time-honored staple of Lucha Libre, it has proven to be the undoing of many fairly contested bouts. □

arena reports

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E-mail results to **PWIQueen@aol.com.**

Spotlight Card of the Month

WILMINGTON, DE—East Coast Wrestling Association at St. Matthew's Parish Hall: **Johnny Maxx** defeated **The Japanese Pool Boy** ... **Billy Bax** beat **Mike Kruel** ... **Xero, Abunai,** & **Mozart Fontaine** beat **Inferno, Ryan Wing,** & **Ruffhouse Rivera** ... Mid-Atlantic champion **Mr. Ooh La La** beat **"Hat Guy" John Bailey** ... **Quiet Storm** beat **Chris Divine** ... **Red** beat **Tony Kozina** and **A.J. Styles** in a three-way match ... **Prince Nana** beat heavyweight champion **Scoot Andrews** to win the title ... **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** beat **Buck Wylde** & **Striker, Low-Ki** & **Xavier,** and **The J Team** in a four-way TLC match to win the tag team title.
(05-04-02)

—"Spotlight" photos by Joe Zanolle

UNITED STATES

ALABAMA

BIRMINGHAM—WWE at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center: **Hardcore Holly** & **Lance Storm** defeated **Randy Orton** & **The Big Valbowski** ... **Jamie Knoble** beat **Shannon Moore** ... **Mark Henry** & **Maven** beat **Albert** & **Christian** ... Cruiserweight champion **The Hurricane** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr., Tajiri,** and **Billy Kidman** in a four-way match ... **Rev. D-Von** & **Deacon Bautista** beat **Hugh Morrus** & **Faarooq** ... **Hulk Hogan** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... World tag team champions **Rico** & **Rikishi** beat **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Edge** pinned **Test** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler, Victoria,** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Triple-H** pinned **Kurt Angle.**
(05-20-02)

—Kevin Lankford

FLORIDA

SUNRISE—WWE at the National Car Rental Center: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Lance Storm** beat **The Hurricane** & **Sho Funaki** ... Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** beat **Billy Kidman** ... **Hardcore Holly** pinned **Randy Orton** ... **Rev. D-Von** pinned **Rikishi** ... World tag team champions **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Al Snow** & **Maven** ... **Hugh Morrus** beat **The Godfather** ... **Mark Henry** beat **Christian** ... **Edge** beat **Test** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Hulk Hogan** & **The Rock** beat **Kurt Angle** & **Chris Jericho.**
(05-04-02)

—Duane Long

GEORGIA

MACON—WWE at the Coliseum: Cruiserweight champion **The Hurricane** pinned **Tajiri** ... **Deacon Bautista** beat **Hugh Morrus** ... **Mark Henry, Billy Kidman, The Big Valbowski,** & **Randy Orton** beat **Albert, Christian, Lance Storm,** & **Rev. D-Von** ... **Shannon Moore** pinned **Jamie Knoble** ... World tag team champions **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** defeated **Al Snow** & **Maven** ... **Tazz** defeated **Hardcore Holly** ... **Faarooq** pinned **Test** in a streetfight ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Rikishi** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Victoria, Stacy Keibler,** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Edge** pinned **Kurt Angle.**
(05-18-02)

—George Dishong

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NCW Arena: **Mike Pittman** & **Scott Cage** beat **Slim J** & **Lance Christian** ... **Rick Michaels** pinned **Otto Schwanz** ... **Blackout** defeated **Sal Del Rio** & **Kid Kool** and **Jeremy V** & **Derrick Driver** in a three-way match ... **Jeremy Lopez** pinned junior heavyweight champ **Todd Sexton** to win the title ... **Total Destruction** beat NWA tag team champions **The New Heavenly Bodies** in a non-title match ... **Kevin Harden** & **Lazz** defeated **Seijin Akki** & **Cynic** ... **Tony Mamaluke** & **Terry Knightinelli** beat **Caprice Coleman** & **Onyx** ... **Adam Jacobs** beat **Tank** ... **The Lost Boyz** beat **Agent Steele** & **Rod Steele** ... **David Young** defeated **Jason Cross.**
(05-04-02)

—David Pierce

ILLINOIS

INA—National Wrestling Coalition at the Community Center: **Mike Ruley** defeated **Kid Dragon** ... Tag team champions **The Super Destroyers** beat **Shuto** & **Venom** ... Ladies champion **Lady Vendetta** defeated **Moonpuppy** ... **Steven Davis, Axe Stevens,** & **Sgt. Kyle** defeated **Tony Storm, Tommy Striker,** & **Tommy Callaway** ... Heavyweight champion **Lucky Dane** beat **Brian the Lion** ... **Brian the Lion** won a 20-man battle royal.
(05-11-02)

—Brad Smithson

MIDLOTHIAN—Lunatic Wrestling Federation at the Recreation Center: **Brandon Bishop** beat **C.M. Punk** ... **The Gravediggers** defeated **Boys R Us**

Billy Bax must have been hoping that Mike Kruel wouldn't live up to his name and be too cruel as he applied a side headlock. He wasn't ... and Bax rallied to pick up the pinfall victory.

... **Bil Patrick** defeated **Spanish Blitzkrieg** ... **Madman Pondo** beat **Mini Jones** to win the hardcore title ... Heavyweight champion **Ryan Boz** beat **Garree Havok** ... **The Styc-It-In Express** beat **The Obnoxious Frat Boys** for the tag team title ... Independent champion **The Mimic** wrestled to a no-contest with **Acid**.
(05-11-02)

—Michelle & Rachel Nixon

INDIANA

CLARKSVILLE—World Wrestling Alliance's "Night Of The Ironman" at the Tri-County Shrine Club: **Purple Haze** beat **Mr. Big** by submission ... **Guage** beat **Skank** ... **J.C. Smooth** defeated **Kix** and **Trimmer** in a three-way dance ... **Johnny Blade** beat **Dub C** ... U.S. champion **Robbin Da Cradle** pinned **Easy D** ... **Cornbread** defeated **Miss Fortune** and **Shaq Daddy** in a three-way dance ... **Dark Angel** pinned **Flesh** ... **Psycho** defeated **Big Red**, **Inhuman**, and **Bloodshot** in a four-corners match to win the vacant hardcore title ... **Tommy Chronic** pinned **Big Bubba Thompson** to win the heavyweight title ... **Miss Fortune** won a $1,000, 20-person battle royal, last eliminating **Easy D**.
(05-11-02)

—Thomas M. Keister

INDIANAPOLIS—Wild Championship Wrestling Outlaws at the Ramada Inn: **Kenny Couragous** defeated **Logan Ray** ... Ladies champion **Drucilla Davie** pinned **Breezie** ... **Uncle Ernie** & **Hillbilly Jed** defeated **Trent Lexington** & **Johnny Showtime** ... **The Black Widow** pinned **Charley Boy** ... **Wild Bill Logsdon** defeated **Tarantula** ... **Whipme Spearz** defeated TV champion **Don Basher** in a steel chain match for the title ... **Itch Coma Weider** & **Shiloh Hunter** won a three-way tag team match against **Johnnie Walker** & **Dick the Bruiser Jr.** and **Simply Marvelous** to win the vacant tag team title ... **Johnny Blaze** defeated **Indiana Kidd Jr.** for the vacant heavyweight title.
(05-04-02)

—Randy Klemme

KENTUCKY

GEORGETOWN—Mountain Wrestling Association at the Convention Center: **Tuffy** pinned **Al Steele** ... **Nick Rivers** defeated **Sheik Aftershock** by reverse decision ... **Justen Idol** defeated **Dregen** ... **Psycho Sam** & ring announcer **Kirk Wesley** defeated **Tiny Tim** & **Bobby Blade** in a streetfight ... Heavyweight champion **The Patriot** pinned **Prince Justice** ... **Mr. Hayes** and **Angel** battled to a double-countout.
(05-19-02)

—Kirk Sheppard

LOUISVILLE—WWE at Freedom Hall: **Jacquelyn** pinned **Crash Holly** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** pinned **Molly Holly** ... **Brock Lesnar** pinned **D-Lo Brown** ... Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** defeated **Rob Van Dam** ... **The Hardy Boyz** beat **Goldust** & **Shawn Stasiak** ... **Rob Conway** & **Nick Dinsmore** beat **Doug Basham** & **Damaja** to win the OVW Southern tag team title ... European champion **William Regal** defeated **Spike Dudley** ... Hardcore champion **Steven Richards** beat **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Bradshaw** ... **Steve Austin** beat **Ric Flair** & **The Big Show** in a steel cage handicap match.
(05-17-02)

—Chuck Wagner

SOMERSET—HCW Championship Wrestling's "Night Of Champions" at the Somerset Center: ***Cruiserweight title tournament, semifinal matches:*** **Scrap Dogg** defeated **Ric Gunner** and **Alex**

The ropes couldn't help ECWA Mid-Atlantic champ Mr. Ooh La La, as his opponent, superfan John "Hat Guy" Bailey, insisted on grabbing his feet and taking him for a ride. Although Bailey had the whole crowd on his side, the snivelling Frenchman found a way to win.

Walker in a three-way dance ... **I.M. Smooth** beat **Stevie Phillips** and **Big Boss Country** in a three-way dance ... ***Finals:*** Smooth beat Dogg to win the title ... ***Non-tournament matches:*** **John Grizzly** beat **The Chosen One** by submission ... Tag team champions **The Louisville Mugger** & **Big Boss Country** defeated **Shawn Christopher** & **Ric Gunner** ... Heavyweight champion **Stan Sierra** beat **Brock Landers**.
(05-10-02)

—Darrell Fugate

CYNTHIANA—Central Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **J-Ice** defeated **Cousin Paul III** ... **Jimmy Lamb** defeated **Rage** ... Heavyweight champ **Bo Johnson** defeated **Payne** ... **Mongoose** pinned **Dr. Love** ... **Joe Price** defeated **Jad T. Lung** ... **Tommy Green** & **Shane Lewis** wrestled **Terry Alan** & **Little Larry D** to a double-countout.
(05-04-02)

—Frank Miller

RICHWOOD—Northern Wrestling Federation at the Richwood Flea Market: **Shane Parker** beat **The Dark Knight** ... **Angel** beat **Zodiac II** ... **Mr. Hayes** beat **Justen Idol** ... **Taxi** beat **Brian Beech** ... Tri-State champion **Nick Rivers** beat **The Spoiler** ... **Psycho Sam** beat **Dregen** ... **Brian Beech** beat **Prince Justice** ... Tag team champions **The O' Lucky Cab Company** beat **The Zodiacs**.
(05-04-02)

—Kirk Sheppard

HARLAN—Independent Pro Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Badboy Boogie** pinned **The Wild Side** ... **The Bad Hillbilly** beat **Parasite** ... **Big Bubba Hutton** defeated **Overkill** ... **Rugged Ronnie** & **The War Machine** beat tag team champs **The Ghost Riders** for the belts ... **Mad Max** & **Mac Daddy** defeated **Jerry Thunder** & **The White Scorpion** ... **Ghost Rider Kenny** won a 14-man battle royal.
(05-03-02)

—Mark Hatmaker

LOUISIANA

NEW ORLEANS—WWE at the New Orleans Arena: **Jacquelyn** pinned **Crash Holly** ... **Tommy Dreamer** pinned hardcore champion **Steven Richards** to win the title, then was pinned by **Raven**, who was pinned by Richards ... **Spike Dudley** & **Shawn Stasiak** beat **Justin Credible** & **Goldust** ... European champion **William Regal** beat **D-Lo Brown** ... **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** ... World champion **The Undertaker** pinned **Rob Van Dam** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **The Prototype** ... **Booker T** & **The Big Show** beat **Matt Hardy** & **Bradshaw** ... **Steve Austin** pinned **Eddie Guerrero**.
(06-02-02)

—Harry Burkett

MARYLAND

GLEN BURNIE—Maryland Championship Wrestling at Michael's Eighth Avenue: **Chris Chetti** & **Danny Doring** defeated **Earl the Pearl** & **Rich Myers** ... **Julio Dinero** pinned **Adam Flash** ... **Jose & Joel Maximo** beat **Chris Divine** & **Quiet Storm** ... **Romeo Valentino** pinned *MCW Rage* TV champion **"Supermodel" Marcus Jordan** to win the title in a match that had Valentino lost, **Candie** would have had to leave MCW, and if Jordan lost, he would be forced to leave MCW ... Cruiserweight champion **Red** pinned **Qenaan Creed** ... **Chad Bowman** & **Dino Divine** defeated tag team champions **Christian York** & **Joey Matthews** to win the title ... **Ronnie Zukko** won a bunkhouse stampede battle royal; as a result, Zukko was supposed to receive a title match with MCW heavyweight champion **The Bruiser**, but Bruiser attacked and injured Zukko immediately after the bunkhouse stampede ... **Tara** beat **Sherri Martel** by submission ... **Christian York**, **Joey Matthews**, & **Rick Morton** beat **Earl the Pearl**, **Rich Myers**, & **Genesis** ... **Shane Douglas** wrestled heavyweight champion **The Bruiser** to a no-contest (**Rick Steamboat** was the special guest referee).
(05-22-02)

—Timothy A. Walker

Chris Divine has Quiet Storm all tied up in a hold that looks like a cross between Y2J's Walls of Jericho and Dean Malenko's cloverleaf. Too bad for him he couldn't get the tapout that Jericho usually get with their favorite finishers.

MASSACHUSETTS

WORCESTER—WWE at the Centrum Centre: Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** pinned **Billy Kidman** ... **Randy Orton** beat **Hardcore Holly** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** & **Lance Storm** beat **The Hurricane** & **Sho Funaki** ... **Tazz** defeated **Rev. D-Von** ... **Mark Henry** & **Hugh Morrus** beat **Albert** & **The Godfather** ... **Kurt Angle** beat **Edge** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... World tag team champions **Billy Gunn & Chuck Palumbo** beat **Al Snow** & **Maven** ... **Rikishi** pinned **Test** ... World champion **Hulk Hogan** pinned **Chris Jericho**.
(05-05-02)

—Wayne Furman

MICHIGAN

FLINT—Michigan Championship Wrestling at the Flint I.M.A.: **Big John Gunn** wrestled to a double-countout with **Marty Brown** ... **Dirty White Boy** defeated **Thursten Howell** ... **Candi Devine** beat **Robbie Rage** in a paddle-on-a-pole match ... **Disco Inferno** beat **Chief Lone Wolf** ... **The Rock 'n' Roll Express** defeated **Big Vito** & **Dream Weaver** ... **Mahoney** & **Kevin Sullivan** beat **Chris Candido** & **The Sandman**.
(05-04-02)

—Dominick Valenti

MINNESOTA

DULUTH—WWE at the D.E.C.C. Arena: **Jacquelyn** pinned **Crash Holly** ... Hardcore champion **Steven Richards** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** ... **X-Pac** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... **Bradshaw** pinned **Booker T** ... **D-Lo Brown** & **Shawn Stasiak** beat **Justin Credible** & **Goldust** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** beat **Molly Holly** ... European champion **William Regal** beat **Spike Dudley** ... Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** defeated **Rob Van Dam**.
(05-24-02)

—Ron Reed

MISSISSIPPI

JACKSON—WWE at the Mississippi State Fair Coliseum: **Christian** beat **Billy Kidman** ... **Hardcore Holly** pinned **Hugh Morrus** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Jamie Knoble** ... **Test** beat **Rob Conway** ... Cruiserweight champion **The Hurricane** beat **Tajiri** ... **The Big Valbowski** & **Randy Orton** beat **Rev. D-Von** & **Deacon Bautista** ... World tag team champions **Rico** & **Rikishi** beat **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Hardcore Holly** (substituting for **Edge**) pinned **Chris Jericho** after Edge interfered ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler**, **Ivory**, and **Victoria** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Triple-H** pinned **Kurt Angle**.
(06-02-02)

—Ron Duckworth

MISSOURI

HANNIBAL—Midwest Powerhouse Wrestling/Gateway Championship Wrestling joint show at the Admiral Coontz Armory: **Prof. Peabody** beat **Ratboy** ... **Miss Chif** defeated **Daizee Haze** ... MPW hardcore champion **Tommy Cross** defeated **Christian Haze** ... **Scott Michaels** & **Jay Stylz** beat **Jamie Killjoy** & **Chico Es Loco** ... **Diamondback Dingo** beat **Crocodile Kid** ... MPW heavyweight champion **Damian Blade** defeated **The Searcher** ... **Billy McNeil** beat **Outkast** and **Matt** in a three-way dance.
(05-03-02)

—Chip Leffler

NEW JERSEY

LONG BRANCH—NWA-Jersey at the Sea Shore Day Camp: **Tony Flow** & **Tommy Force** beat **Billy Rivell** & **The Hyena** ... **TNT** wrestled **Hashem** to a double-disqualification ... **The Great Blazini** pinned **Dave Mysterio** to capture the lightweight title ... **The Patriot** defeated **Biggie Biggs** ... **Kevin Knight** beat **Roman** ... **J.L. Superstar** beat **Danny Doring** and The Wall in a triple threat table match to capture the shore title.
(05-18-02)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

TOMS RIVER—Phoenix Championship Wrestling at the Recreation Station: **Matt Vandal** pinned **Julio Dinero** ... **General Zeig** & **Kuhl** beat **The Holy Rollers** after **Prodigy** interfered ... **Prodigy** pinned **Chi Chi Cruz** to retain the TV title ... **Tiger Khan** pinned **Dicky Benz** ... **Jumbo Gunns** pinned **The Prophet** ... **Ric Blade** won a battle royal ... **Jerry Lynn** pinned **Little Guido** ... **The Wall** pinned **Harley Lewis** to win the heavyweight title ... **Nova**, **Frankie Kazarian**, & **Chris Chetti** defeated **Christian York**, **Joey Matthews**, & **Cham-Pain**.
(05-17-02)

—Don Robinson

BAYONNE—Jersey All Pro Wrestling at the Charity Hall: **The Sheik** defeated **Roachie Roach** ... **Ghost Shadow** & **Elaxx** defeated **The Big Black Unit** ... **Mike Kruel** defeated **Striker** ... **The Shalion Wrecking Crew** defeated **The CSC** ... **Rainchild** & **Jay Lethal** defeated **The Strong Brothers** ... **Tony Kozina** defeated **Low-Ki** ... **The S.A.T.** defeated **The Briscoe Brothers** ... **The Insane Dragon** defeated **Red** ... Triple crown champion **Dixie** defeated **Deranged**.
(05-03-02)

—Martin DeLario

NEW YORK

ELMHURST—USA Pro Wrestling's "Big" Dick Dudley Memorial Show at the Elks' Lodge: **Larry McKenny** & **Norman** beat **Joel** & **Jose Maximo** ... **Masked Maniac** beat **Napalm** ... **Boogalou Lou** & **Low Rider** beat **Mike Tobin** & **Striker** ... **Sam Dudley**, **New Dynamite Kid**, & **Rev. Zero** beat **Island of Pain**, **Brock Vendetta**, & **Luke** ... **Red** beat U.S. champ **Xavier** to win the title ... **Rockshah 337** beat **Sticky Rodz** ... **Kid Kruel** beat **Guido Maritato** in a loser-leaves-town-for-90 days "I Quit" match ... **The Baptized** beat **The Rednecks From Hell** ... ***Gauntlet match:*** **Nick Divine** beat **Damian Dragon** ... **Tim Arson** beat **Nick Divine** ... **Crazy Ivan** beat **Tim Arson** ... **Prince Nana** beat **Crazy Ivan** ... **Chris Divine** beat **Prince Nana** ... **Quiet Storm** beat **Chris Divine** ... **Quiet Storm** beat **Ghost Shadow** ... **Wayne the Convenience Store Guy** beat **Quiet Storm** to win the gauntlet match ... **Wayne the Convenience Store Guy** beat New York champ **Iceberg** to win the title ... **Homicide** beat **Tony DeVito** ... **Low-Ki** & **Xavier** beat tag team champs **Da Hit Squad** by disqualification ... **Crowbar** beat **Chris Candido** ... Heavyweight champion **Mahoney** beat **Gangrel**.
(05-18-02)

—Steven Rossi

NORTH CAROLINA

CRESTON—Triton Championship Wrestling at the Riverview Community Center: **The Death Riders** beat **Jason King** & **George South Jr.** ... **Excalibur** pinned **Tommy Fantastic** ... **Jack Miller** pinned **Shane Rose** to win the U.S. title ... **Christian Kane** won a battle royal to become the new TV champion ... **Allen King** & **Jeff Storm** beat **Generation P.S.** to become the tag team champions ... **Beau James** & **Buddy Landell** beat **Bruiser Graham** & **Jimmy Valiant** ... **Rick Morton** pinned **George South Sr.** ... Heavyweight champion **Brady Hawks** pinned **Rick Karloff**.
(05-25-02)

—Brock Chandler

HENDERSONVILLE—United Wrestling Federation at the VFW Building: **Max Mayhem** won a gauntlet hardcore match over **Viper**, **David Justice**, **Jessie Black**, and **Big Daddy Boom Boom** ... **Scar Stevens** beat **Smiley Robinson** ... **Summer Lewis** beat **Destiny Devine** to win the ladies title ... **Jeff Lewis** beat **Country Boy Junior** to win the Carolinas title ... **Vincent I. Pain** & **Mikael Adrian** beat **Brandon Knight** & **Big Money** by disqualification ... **Cruiser Lewis** beat **Norton Lewis** in a street-fight ... **Mack Truck** beat **Country Boy Sam** to win the heavyweight title.
(05-25-02)

—Dan Parris

SHALLOTTE—North American Championship

High-flyers Red and Tony Kozina got themselves a bit tied up when they went to war in a scintillating three-way match also involving A.J. Styles. Believe it or not, Kozina was working over Red's legs here. Nevertheless, Red won the bout.

Wrestling at the Middle School: **Scott Powers** beat **Johnny Kidd** ... **Bubba Brooks** & **Steve Stasiak** beat **Secro Jr.** & **Tracy James** ... **Rev. Slim** & **Black Angel** beat **Slash** & **Scar** ... **Danny Dollar** beat **The Nightmare** by disqualification ... **Chris Steel** & **Scott Powers** beat **The Power Crew** ... **Bubba Kirk** beat **Sevar the Bounty Hunter** ... **Persephoni** beat **Lelani Kai** by disqualification ... **Bobby Fulton** beat **The Barbarian** by disqualification ... **Rev. Slim** & **Black Angel** beat **Big Daddy** & **Big Tony Cicero**.
(05-25-02)

—Dan Parris

RALEIGH—WWE at the Entertainment & Sports Arena: **Jacquelyn** pinned **Crash Holly** ... **Brock Lesnar** beat **D-Lo Brown** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** beat **Molly Holly** ... **Bull Buchanan** beat **Ron Waterman** ... **The Hardy Boyz** beat **Goldust** & **Shawn Stasiak** ... Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** beat **Rob Van Dam** ... Hardcore champion **Steven Richards** pinned **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** ... European champion **William Regal** beat **Spike Dudley** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Bradshaw** ... **Steve Austin** beat **The Big Show** & **Ric Flair** in a steel cage handicap match.
(05-18-02)

—Will Welsh

PENNSYLVANIA

LEBANON—Lethal Wrestling Federation at the Eagles Hall: **Fumar** beat **Phantasmo** ... **D'Licious** beat **Damien Destruction** ... **Pinky** won a battle royal ... **Dr. Ruthless** wrestled to a double-disqualification with **Mark Mest** ... **J-Money**, **8-Ball**, & **The Cremator** beat **Joey** & **Mikey Wrath** & **Glen Osbourne** ... **Rob Noxious** defeated **Lobo Loco** ... **Hatred Inc.** beat **The Crash Crew** ... **Rockin' Rebel** beat **Pinky**.
(05-31-02)

—Dustin M. Rodkey

ALLENTOWN—Chikara at the Wrestle Factory: **Mister ZERO** pinned **Dragonfly** ... **Beauty** & **The Beast** defeated **The Night Shift** ... **Kid Kruel** defeated **Zane Madrox** by submission ... **Blind Rage** beat **UltraMantis** ... **Reckless Youth**, **Mike Quackenbush**, & **Don Montoya** beat **Chris Hero**, **Colt Cabana**, & **C.M. Punk** when Reckless pinned Punk.
(05-25-02)

—John Francis

PHILADELPHIA—3PW at Viking Hall: **Joey Matthews** & **Christian York** defeated **Dylan Night** & **Rapid Fire Maldonado** ... **Robert Pigeon** defeated **John Toland** ... **Colt Cabana** defeated **Chris Hero** ... **"Pit Bull" Gary Wolfe** defeated **Rockin' Rebel** in a dog-collar match ... **The Blue Meanie** defeated **Bilvis Wesley** ... **Jasmin St. Claire** beat **Miss Candie** in an evening gown match ... **Public Enemy** defeated **Joey Matthews** & **Christian York** ... A three-way bodybag match between **The Sandman**, **New Jack**, and **Sabu** (with **Tod Gordon** as guest referee) ended in a no-contest.
(05-18-02)

—Barbara Wertz

SHAMOKIN—World Xtreme Wrestling at Skate-R-Way: Cruiserweight champion **Tommy Suede** defeated **Supreme Lee Great** ... **Shane Black** beat **Big Poppa Pete** ... **Big Dog Molsonn** & **Skinhead Ivan** beat **Jersey Devil** & **Nuisance** ... **Mason Cage** pinned **Billy Reil** ... **Tonga Kid**, **Samu**, & **L.A. Smooth** defeated **Da Hit Squad** & **Gene Snisky** ... **NYPD** defeated **Neal** & **Bob** ... **Billy Dream** & **Jessica Daly** defeated **Malachi** & **Valentina** in a mixed tag team match ... **Kamala** pinned **Metal Maniac** ... **Wenzel** pinned **Supreme Lee Great** ... Heavyweight champion **Sugaa** beat **The Sandman**.
(05-17-02)

—Timothy A. Walker

RED LION—National Championship Wrestling at the MC Sports Complex: **Romeo Valentino** beat **Greg Matthews** ... **Brittany** beat **Cinnamon** in a bra and panties match ... Welterweight champion **Darren Wyse** beat **The Amish Assassin** ... Tag team champions **The Bad Crew** defeated **Joey Matthews** & **Christian York** in a TLC match ... **Cotton the Bad Butcher** won a battle royal ... **Cotton the Bad Butcher** beat **Kid Kattrell** ... **The Hungarian Barbarian** beat **Nick Berk** ... Heavyweight champion **Adam Flash** defeated **Mike Quackenbush** ... **Larry Zbyszko** beat **Dino Divine** by disqualification.
(05-04-02)

—Dustin M. Rodkey

SOUTH CAROLINA

WEST COLUMBIA—Carolina Championship Wrestling at Merlin's: Heavyweight champ **Mack Truck** defeated **C.W. Anderson** ... U.S. champ **Black Angel** defeated **Darin Fate** ... Cruiserweight champ **Xavier Night** defeated **Chris Chance** ... **Vordell Walker** defeated **Talon** ... **Michael Devine** defeated **Mike Nova** ... **Tony**

The evil Prince Nana knew exactly what he wanted to do in his match with Scoot Andrews. He wanted the ECWA heavyweight title, and he was going to work over the leg that Scott had broken some six weeks earlier until he got it. In the end, Andrews had little choice but to submit.

WWE has given fans some memorable TLC matches, so why couldn't the ECWA do the same? The four teams involved in this one sure did. Here Joel Maximo hits a swanton bomb from atop a ladder on The J Team's J.R. Ryder.

Giuliani defeated **Krazy K** ... **Mykata** defeated **The Amazing Velvet** and **Jess Bradley** in a three-way match.
(05-26-02)

—Liz Hunter

CHESNEE—American Pro Wrestling at the Coliseum: **Viper** pinned **Jesse Black** ... **Chad Colt** pinned **Mack Truck** ... Cruiserweight champion **Scotty Smooth** defeated **Wes Walker** ... **Buckshot** battled **Dash Riproc** to a no-contest ... **Jay** & **Johnny Eagle** beat **Reddog** & **Boomer Payne** ... TV champion **Micky Richards** beat **Bubba Hogg** ... **Bubba Hogg** pinned **Bulldyke** ... **Mack Truck** & **Viper** defeated **Wes Walker** & **Jesse Black** ... **Boomer Payne** pinned **Buckshot** ... **Johnny Eagle** defeated **Reddog** by disqualification ... **Chief Jay Eagle** defeated **Scotty Smooth** by disqualification ... TV champion **Micky Richards** beat **Chad Colt**.
(05-10-02)

—Cody Ladd

TENNESSEE

EAST RIDGE—UEW at the Terry Gordy Memorial Arena: **Jason Hampton** beat **Jayson Phoenix** ... **Austin Wheeler** defeated **Chit Martinez** ... **Rawhead Rex** beat **Twiggy** ... **Nic Rampage** defeated **Big Doug** ... **Chuck E. Chuck** & **Ben Thrasher** beat **Drew Game** & **Skunk**.
(06-01-02)

—Michele Painter

NASHVILLE—WWE Judgment Day pay-per-view at the Gaylord Entertainment Center: Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **Rob Van Dam** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** pinned **Stacy Keibler** ... **Brock Lesnar** & **Paul Heyman** beat **The Hardy Boyz** when Heyman pinned **Jeff Hardy** ... **Steve Austin** beat **The Big Show** & **Ric Flair** in a handicap match when he pinned Flair ... **Edge** pinned **Kurt Angle** in a hair vs. hair match ... **Triple-H** pinned **Chris Jericho** in a "Hell In A Cell" match ... **Rico** & **Rikishi** beat World tag team champions **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** to win the title when Rikishi pinned Palumbo ... **The Undertaker** pinned World champion **Hulk Hogan** to win the title.
(05-19-02)

—George Dishong

TEXAS

NORTH RICHLAND HILLS—NWA Southwest at the Texas Indoor Arena: **Justin 2 Fine** pinned **Chuck Murphy** ... **Bobby 2 Badd** & **Harley Johnson** beat **Shane Beddingfield** & **Chris Redd** ... **Johnny Walker** pinned **B.J. Turner** ... **J.P. Black** pinned **Psycho Simpson** ... **Johnny Walker** defeated **Harley Johnson** by disqualification ... **Jimbo Starr** beat **Bobby 2 Badd** by disqualification ... **J.P. Black** pinned **Justin 2 Fine** ... **Psycho Simpson** pinned TV champ **Brett Bonz** to win the title ... **Hotstuff Hernandez** pinned **Steve DeMarco**.
(05-24-02)

—Rob Moore

CRANDALL—Star Wrestling Federation at the SWF Arena: **Dave the Rave** beat **Isaiah** ... **Punisher I** beat **Widowmaker** ... **Punisher II** beat **Big Papa Jones** ... **Cody Knight** & **Brett Barnes** beat **Scorpion** & **James Crowe** ... **"Krazy" Kris Kaos** beat Texas champ **Tim Swiney** to win the title ... **Jimmy James** & **Shanard Jackson** defeated **Ray Evans** & **Max Muscles** by disqualification.
(05-18-02)

—Darren H. Evans

ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: **The Prince** defeated **Chuck E. Charms** ... **The KEG Brothers** defeated **The Pop Revolution** and **Iron Eagle** & **Kevin Douglas** in a three-way dance to win the tag team title ... **Jared Steele** defeated **Mike Thunder** ... **Action Jackson** defeated **Zane Morris** in a steel cage match ... TV champ **Shadow** defeated **Chris Chronic** ... **Tyson Brooks** defeated **Largus Black** in a leather strap match ... Heavyweight champion **Mike Foxx** pinned **Sabu**. Due to a prematch stipulation, Lance Romance had to retire from PCW.
(05-04-02)

—Karson Key

VIRGINIA

NEWPORT NEWS—Virginia Championship Wrestling at Mitty's Nightclub: **Korie James** beat **Logan Knight** ... **Brandon Day** defeated **Greg Steele** ... **Spank** beat **Preston Quinn** ... **Joey Matthews** & **Christian York** beat **Sonjay Dutt** & **Dirty Money** ... **Phil Brown** & **Steve Perez** beat **Joey Matthews** & **Christian York** ... Cruiserweight champion **Sean Lei** beat heavyweight champion **Q-Sic** to win the title.
(05-18-02)

—Dominick Valenti

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

RED DEER, SASKATCHEWAN—WWE at the Centrium: **Crash Holly** defeated **Jacquelyn** ... **Tommy Dreamer** beat hardcore champion **Steven Richards**, then lost it to **Raven**, who lost it back to Richards ... European champion **William Regal** beat **Spike Dudley** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Bradshaw** ... **Brock Lesnar** defeated **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** ... World champion **The Undertaker** defeated **Rob Van Dam** ... **D-Lo Brown** & **Shawn Stasiak** beat **Justin Credible** & **Goldust** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** beat **Molly Holly** ... **Booker T** beat **Matt Hardy** ... **Steve Austin** defeated Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** in a non-title match.
(05-26-02)

—Matt Brock

REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN—WWE at Regina Exhibition Park: Cruiserweight champion **The Hurricane** beat **Tajiri** and **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a three-way match ... **Christian** pinned **Sho Funaki** ... **Test** beat **Maven** ... **Randy Orton** & **The Big Valbowski** beat **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Lance Storm** beat **Hardcore Holly** ... **Mark Henry, Billy Kidman**, & **Hugh Morrus** defeated **Albert, Rev. D-Von**, & **Deacon Bautista** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Edge** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Triple-H** pinned **Kurt Angle**.
(05-26-02)

—Bruce Foster

SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN—WWE at Saskatoon Place: **Sho Funaki** pinned **Christian** ... **Test** pinned **Maven** ... Cruiserweight champion **The Hurricane** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** and **Tajiri** in a three-way match ... **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **The Big Valbowski** & **Randy Orton** ... **Billy Kidman, Mark Henry**, & **Hugh Morrus** beat **Albert, Rev. D-Von**, & **Deacon Bautista** ... **Lance Storm** beat **Hardcore Holly** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Edge** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Triple-H** beat **Kurt Angle**.
(05-25-02)

—Frank Krewda

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA—WWE at the Winnipeg Arena: **Jacquelyn** pinned **Crash Holly** ... **Tommy Dreamer** beat hardcore champion **Steven Richards** to win the title, then lost it to **Raven**, who lost it back to Richards ... European champion **William Regal** beat **Spike Dudley** ... **Brock Lesnar** defeat-

ed **Buh Buh Ray Dudley** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Bradshaw** ... World champion **The Undertaker** beat **Rob Van Dam** in a steel cage match ... **D-Lo Brown** & **Shawn Stasiak** beat **Justin Credible** & **Goldust** ... Women's champion **Trish Stratus** beat **Molly Holly** ... **Booker T** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Steve Austin** beat Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** in a non-title match.
(05-25-02)

—Mark Hendricks

MONTREAL, QUEBEC—Northern Championship Wrestling at the NCW Center: **Chakal** defeated **Franky the Mobster** to regain the Quebec title ... **Denniss Sensation** beat **Kazuko Yeroshima** ... **Raid** beat **Domino Jonathan** & **Rush** ... **Nova Cain** & **Jagged** beat **Big Guns Guido** & his mystery partner, **Farmer Joe** ... **Dream Killer** beat **Guy Williams** in a tables/ marathon match ... Inter-city champion **Black Eagle** beat **Gorgeous Mike** ... **Iceman** beat **Piranah** in his retirement match ... **Vertigo** beat **Made of Money** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **FlatFace Jeremy** beat TV champion **Diablero** to regain the title ... **Ground Zero** beat tag team champs **Nightmare** & **Nightstalker** to capture the title.
(05-18-02)

—Marc St-Georges

CORNWALL, ONTARIO—WWE at the Civic Complex: **Mark Henry**, **The Big Valbowski**, & **Randy Orton** defeated **Albert**, **The Godfather**, & **Lance Storm** ... **Faarooq** pinned **Test** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Sho Funaki** and **The Hurricane** in a three-way match ... World tag team champions **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Al Snow** & **Maven** ... **Christian** pinned **Rev. D-Von** ... **Chris Jericho** defeated **Rikishi** ... **Stacy Keibler** beat **Torrie Wilson** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Edge** pinned **Kurt Angle**.
(05-13-02)

—Fred Gauss

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA—WWE at the Metro Centre: **Christian** beat **Sho Funaki** ... **Hardcore Holly** pinned **Randy Orton** ... Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** beat **Billy Kidman** and **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** in a three-way match ... **Albert**, **The Godfather**, & **Lance Storm** beat **Mark Henry**, **The Hurricane**, & **The Big Valbowski** ... World tag team champions **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Al Snow** & **Maven** ... **Test** pinned **Faarooq** ... **Rev. D-Von** defeated **Tazz** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Rikishi** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Edge** beat **Kurt Angle** in a steel cage match.
(05-12-02)

—Dan Murphy

QUEBEC CITY, QUEBEC—WWE at the Quebec Colisee Arena: Cruiserweight champion **Tajiri** beat **Billy Kidman** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Sho Funaki** ... **Christian** beat **Sylvan** ... **Mark Henry**, **The Hurricane**, & **The Big Valbowski** defeated **Albert**, **The Godfather**, & **Lance Storm** ... **Tazz** defeated **Rev. D-Von** ... World tag team champions **Billy Gunn** & **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Al Snow** & **Maven** ... **Hardcore Holly** beat **Randy Orton** ... **Faarooq** pinned **Test** ... **Chris Jericho** defeated **Rikishi** ... **Torrie Wilson** beat **Stacy Keibler** and **Ivory** in a swimsuit challenge ... **Edge** beat **Kurt Angle** in a steel cage match.
(05-11-02)

—Dan Murphy

OLDCASTLE, ONTARIO—Border City Wrestling at the Ciociaro Club: **Eric Young** beat **Petey Williams** ... **Elvis Elliot** defeated **Bret Nikita** ... **Gutter** & **The Hacker** beat **Dyson Pryce** & **Mike Legacy** ... **Stevie Lee** beat **Larry Destiny** ... **King Kong Bundy** defeated five unnamed opponents at once ... **Tyson Dux** & **El Tornado** beat **El Fuego** & **Ruffy Silverstein** ... **Simon Diamond** pinned **Chris Sabin** ... Tag champs **Cyrus** & **Terry Taylor** beat **Scott D'Amore** & **Sabu** by disqualification ... Can-Am champ **Johnny Swinger** pinned **Jerry Lynn**.
(05-02-02)

—Ron Maxwell

All the hard work and pain paid off for Joel and his brother, Jose (collectively known as The S.A.T.), for they were just a little better and a little tougher than the other three teams, at least on this night. They left the ring as the new ECWA tag champs.

ENGLAND

LONDON—WWE Insurrextion pay-per-view at Wembley Arena: **Rob Van Dam** beat Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** by disqualification ... **Trish Stratus** & **Jacquelyn** beat **Molly Holly** & **Jazz** ... **X-Pac** pinned **Bradshaw** ... **Booker T** pinned hardcore champion **Steven Richards** to win the belt, then lost it to **Crash Holly**, who lost it back to Booker, who lost it back to Richards ... **The Hardy Boyz** beat **Brock Lesnar** & **Shawn Stasiak** ... European champion **Spike Dudley** pinned **William Regal** ... **Steve Austin** defeated **The Big Show** ... **Triple-H** pinned **The Undertaker**.
(05-04-02)

—Colin Lyle

BIRMINGHAM—WWE at the National Exhibition Center Arena: **Rob Van Dam** pinned **X-Pac** ... **Goldust** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** ... Women's champion **Jazz** beat **Jacquelyn** by submission ... **Crash Holly** pinned **Justin Credible** to win the hardcore title in a four-way match also involving champion **Steven Richards** and **Shawn Stasiak**. Richards then pinned Crash to regain the title ... Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **Jeff Hardy** ... European champion **Spike Dudley** pinned **William Regal** ... **Jerry Lawler** & **Trish Stratus** beat **Mr. Perfect** & **Molly Holly** ... **The Big Show** pinned **Bradshaw** ... **Brock Lesnar** & **The Undertaker** beat **Triple-H** & **Matt Hardy** ... **Steve Austin** pinned **Scott Hall**.
(05-03-02)

—Tom Radcliffe

GERMANY

COLOGNE—WWE at Koln Arena: European champion **Spike Dudley** pinned **William Regal** ... Women's champion **Jazz** defeated **Jacquelyn** ... **Brock Lesnar** pinned **Crash Holly** ... **X-Pac** pinned **Jeff Hardy** ... **Tommy Dreamer** pinned hardcore champion **Steven Richards** to win the title, then lost it to **Goldust**, who lost it back to Richards ... **Jerry Lawler** & **Trish Stratus** beat **Mr. Perfect** & **Molly Holly** ... Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** beat **Rob Van Dam** ... **Ric Flair** beat **Booker T** ... **The Big Show** defeated **Bradshaw** ... **Steve Austin** pinned **The Undertaker**.
(05-01-02)

—Joseph Borman

SCOTLAND

GLASGOW—WWE at the Scottish Exhibition & Conference Center: **Rob Van Dam** defeated **X-Pac** ... **Jerry Lawler** & **Jacquelyn** beat **Mr. Perfect** & **Molly Holly** ... **Brock Lesnar** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... **Shawn Stasiak** pinned **Crash Holly** to win the hardcore title in a four-way match also involving champion **Steven Richards** and **Justin Credible**. Stasiak then lost the title to Credible, who lost it to Crash, who lost it back to Richards, who lost it back to Stasiak, who lost it back to Richards again ... Women's champion **Jazz** defeated **Trish Stratus** by submission ... **Steve Austin** pinned **The Big Show** ... **Tommy Dreamer** & **Spike Dudley** beat **Booker T** & **Goldust** in a table match ... Intercontinental champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **Jeff Hardy** ... **Scott Hall** pinned **Bradshaw** ... **Ric Flair** & **Triple-H** defeated **William Regal** & **The Undertaker**.
(05-02-02)

—Lawrence McAllister

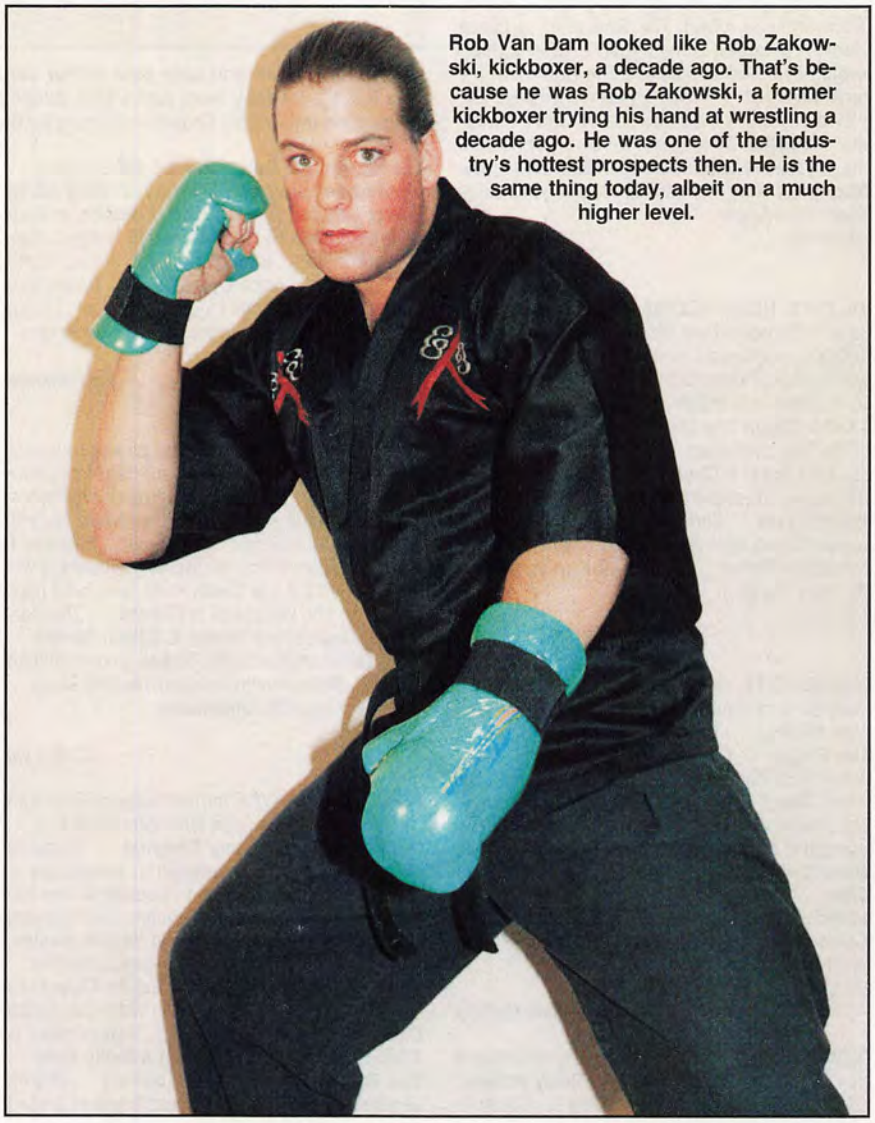
PWI classic

From the February 1992 issue

STARS ON THE HORIZON:

WRESTLING'S HOTTEST PROSPECTS FOR 1992

When 1991 began, there weren't many youngsters making important career strides. But by mid-year, eight sensational newcomers started making big waves—and made the year one of the best ever for emerging superstars!



Rob Van Dam looked like Rob Zakowski, kickboxer, a decade ago. That's because he was Rob Zakowski, a former kickboxer trying his hand at wrestling a decade ago. He was one of the industry's hottest prospects then. He is the same thing today, albeit on a much higher level.

THERE SEEMS TO be an unwritten rule about the biggest federations: They never seem to give young stars a break.

That fact is proven by looking at the roster of the WWF. During the year 1991, not a single rookie broke out of the preliminary ranks to make it into even semi-main event status. How could they, with the Federation becoming the new home of Ric Flair, Big Bully Busick, Rick Steamboat, Berzerker, and The Undertaker during the year?

So where are all the young stars developing their skills? Thankfully, WCW seems to be more than willing to allow rookies to compete. Seven months ago, unheralded Johnny B. Badd made his debut in the federation. After shrewdly selecting Teddy

Long as his manager, Badd is now a leading candidate for the Rookie of the Year award.

Things were even more promising in other organizations. Global, the USWA, the LPWA, Tri-State, and Georgia All-Star Wrestling have been teeming with bright young talent. In fact, the bumper crop of sensational rookies bodes very well for the future of the sport as the decade progresses.

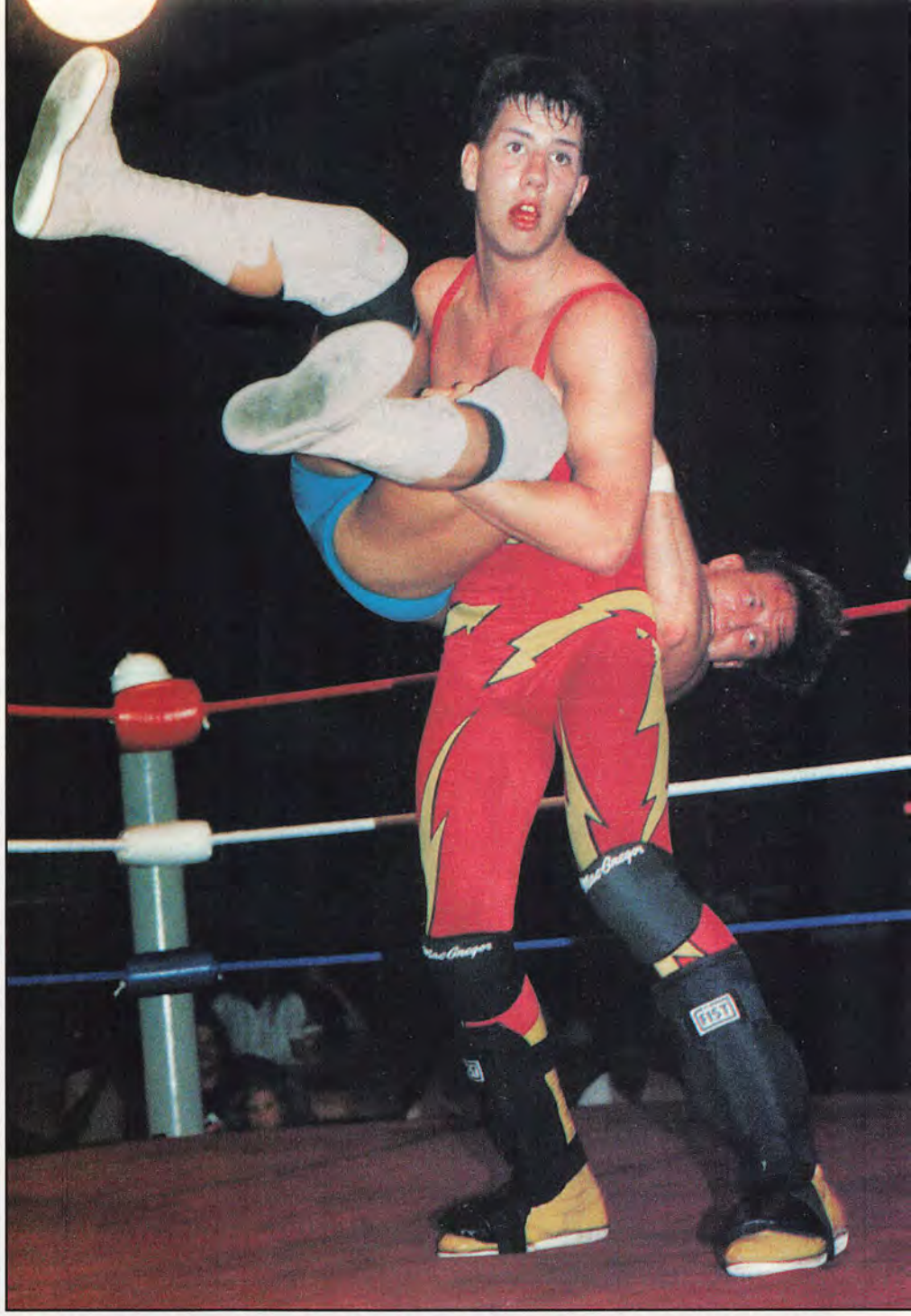
Eight young stars have emerged as the best of this new breed of ultra-athletic grapplers. Any one of them could become a major factor—in any major federation—in the coming year.

Terry Leland: Bad tactics. Bad attitude.

"Bad body," enthuses fellow Georgia All-Star rulebreaker and weightlifting enthusiast Scott Anthony, who knows all about such things.

It's obvious from looking at the sculpted 6'4", 252-pound rulebreaker that Leland spends an inordinate amount of time in the gymnasium. But what isn't so immediately apparent is the pronounced mean streak that has made Leland the Georgia All-Star champion within two months of his debut.

"Titles are fine, but I prefer making guys spit out their teeth," said Leland, who often teams with equally sordid Steve Lawler. "Already, I've crippled seven of the supposed wrestlers around here. Who's next?"



Long before he was X-Pac or Syxx, and even before he was The 1-2-3 Kid, Sean Waltman wrestled as The Lightning Kid. He was one of the can't-miss prospects in 1992 who definitely made the most of his potential.

Rob Zakowski: Upon first glance at this gifted Battle Creek, Michigan, native, he looks like any other wrestler who's just starting out. But after seeing him in action, most observers would swear Zakowski is a five-year veteran—he's *that* advanced, and he's had fewer than 50 pro matches.

"Of all the people who wrestled me for the USWA light heavyweight title this year, Rob gave me the toughest matches," said an impressed "Nightmare" Dan Davis. "He hit me with some stiff-legged kicks to the face that were so lightning quick, I thought I'd been hit by *real* lightning. You can tell his amateur kickboxing training really paid off for him."

But even his past sport didn't help him originate his split-legged moonsault, which stands out as the most innovative maneuver of 1991. Zakowski bounds off the top rope and delivers a short, compact moonsault that would even do Japanese star The Great Muta proud.

"People tell me I'm doing well," said the humble Zakowski, who also competed in the South Atlantic area and in Canada. "I'm just starting out, so that's all I can really ask for right now."

Van Hammer: After a handful of matches in the Georgia All-Star area (probably the sport's best

The Patriot

PWI ratings

February 1992

TOP 10
1. Lex Luger
2. Hulk Hogan
3. Sting
4. Bret Hart
5. Ron Simmons
6. The Patriot
7. Jerry Lawler
8. Ric Flair
9. Steve Austin
10. Eddie Gilbert

TAG TEAMS
1. The Enforcers
2. The Legion of Doom
3. The Freebirds
4. The Nasty Boys
5. Robert Fuller & Jeff Jarrett
6. The Beverly Brothers
7. The Patriots
8. Chris Walker & Steve Simpson
9. The Natural Disasters
10. Rick Steiner & Bill Kazmaier

WCW
World champion:
Lex Luger
1. Sting
2. Ron Simmons
3. Cactus Jack
4. Steve Austin
5. Dustin Rhodes
6. Bobby Eaton
7. Rick Steiner
8. Johnny B. Badd
9. Abdullah the Butcher
10. Barry Windham

WWF
World champion:
Hulk Hogan
1. Bret Hart
2. Ric Flair
3. Warlord
4. Randy Savage
5. The Undertaker
6. Irwin R. Schyster
7. Roddy Piper
8. Rick Steamboat
9. Big Bossman
10. Greg Valentine

USWA
Heavyweight champion:
Jerry Lawler
1. Eric Embry
2. Tom Prichard
3. Eddie Gilbert
4. Tony Anthony
5. Dutch Mantel
6. Billy Travis
7. Doug Masters
8. Bill Dundee
9. Dan Davis
10. Brian Christopher

MOST POPULAR
1. Hulk Hogan
2. Sting
3. Ron Simmons
4. Bret Hart
5. The Patriot
6. Jerry Lawler
7. Sid Justice
8. Barry Windham
9. Brian Pillman
10. Virgil

MOST HATED
1. Ric Flair
2. Lex Luger
3. Jake Roberts
4. Cactus Jack
5. The Undertaker
6. Abdullah the Butcher
7. Eddie Gilbert
8. Steve Austin
9. Eric Embry
10. Berzerker

breeding ground for young hopefuls), this 6'6", 290-pound heavy metal lover headed for WCW. He defeated York Foundation star Terrence Taylor in just 1:08 in his first match in the federation!

"I love rock music—and the louder, the better," said Hammer, who is usually seen with an electric guitar slung over his shoulder. "That's the way I want my matches to be, too—huge explosions of nonstop action. I hope the fans like what I'm doing, because I need their feedback—no pun intended—if I'm going to be a success."

"Dangerous" Denise Storm: Early in 1991, it was assumed that Terri Power had run out of competition—as far as strength is concerned, at least—in the LPWA.

By summer, that theory was destroyed with the emergence of

"Dangerous" Denise Storm had a nice little run in the LPWA and elsewhere, but did she ever become a big star? Does that question even need to be asked?

If you're asking, "Who are they?" about Judge Dread (above left) and Terry Leland (above right), you're far from alone. Both men had raw skill and plenty of size, but neither came close to making a big impact on a national level.

Storm, a 5'8", 170-pound prototype of the perfect 1990s athlete. Storm battled the previously unbeaten Power to several double-DQ verdicts, making her probably the only wrestler who can stand up to Power on her own terms.

"Looks like I took the starch out of *that* myth pretty damn fast," said Storm arrogantly. "But I'm not going to be happy until I score that pinfall and send Terri whimpering back to Portland for good."

Lightning Kid: By 1991 standards, this Tampa native doesn't look like much of a threat. Reed-thin with only 201 pounds on a 6'2" frame, the Kid possesses deceiving power—and perhaps the finest aerial ability of any light heavyweight.

The devious Kid captured the first Global light heavyweight title in a July tournament, and it was Kid's incredible, gravity-defying leaps from the top turnbuckle that spelled the difference in the final bout against Jerry Lynn. In September, Kid lost the belt to Chaz, but regained it just two days later.

"Chaz got lucky, that's all," insisted the Kid, who has the unique ability to make entire arenas despise him before he even locks up with an opponent. "I'm the first American wrestler to make it big with pretty much a Japanese style. The era of the stationary wrestler is over, because I'm going to rewrite history with my fearless style."

Chaz: Naturally, Chaz doesn't agree with the Kid's summation of his own talent. This 6', 212-pound fan favorite perfectly blends a high-flying aerial style with a solid mat game.

Chaz learned a great deal from his father, Tugboat Taylor, but he also uses maneuvers his burly father was never agile enough to even attempt, including his amazing Chaz-tiser, a flying bulldog headlock from the top rope.

"I'm twice the wrestler the Kid is," said the confident Chaz. "I blasted him with my Chaz-tiser, and I pinned him clean. There is nothing he can do that I can't do better—in and out of the ring." Obviously, this is one war that's far from being completed.

Sabu: Found by the original Sheik on the streets of Bombay, India, about a year ago, this silent and athletic youngster scored a series of upset victories in the USWA during the mid-summer. Even veteran Jeff Jarrett was impressed.

"Obviously, Sheik trained this guy well," said Jarrett, who engaged in several battles with the native Indian. "He's a hot prospect, but why does he keep staring at the lights? It's like he's never been in a building before!"

Rumor had it Sheik recently sequestered Sabu somewhere in Europe for further lessons in sadism. The sport has been warned.

Judge Dread: At 6'7" and a whopping 340 pounds, this mysterious stranger has the size and power to crush just about any opponent. Add to that his surprising agility and skill, and he becomes even more of a dominating force.

Surly and unshaven, Dread re-

A lot of people expected Van Hammer to be a major star for WCW, and though he earned a nice push in the early-1990s, he burned out quickly. He still makes the occasional appearance on the independent scene, though.

Not longer after this story was published, Sabu started to earn a reputation as one of the most exciting and innovative stars in all of wrestling. He was one of the main reasons ECW got as hot as it did. And he became a star in some part because of his rivalry with Rob Zakowski/Van Dam.

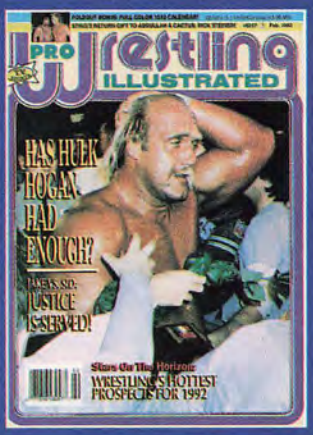
fused to be interviewed for this article. But USWA mainstay Freezer Thompson, who wrestled Dread in July, knows more about the black-hatted monster than he'd like to know.

"He practically broke my back with a piledriver," said Thompson, who, at 320 pounds, is not easy to lift. "I'm no coward, but I never want to wrestle the Judge again. From the look in his eye, you can tell he really wants to hurt people. I thought people like that were forced out of wrestling years ago!"

Not *all,* Freezer. Some of them are rookies. □

PWI, February 1992

The cover: "Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough?" Yes, that's the question that was asked in a 1992 (not 2002) headline, although it would also be appropriate today. It's odd looking back at a story from a decade ago in which Hogan talks about becoming more of a special attraction in the ring than a regular presence. Aren't his critics suggesting he do that today? The story also mentions his blossoming movie career and how he might want to focus more on that in the future. Ten years later, the same is being said about The Rock.

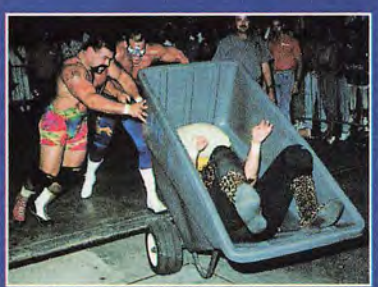


The centerfold: It wasn't the regular pinup/bio that was featured in this issue. Instead it was a foldout 1992 calendar complete with pictures of many of wrestling's top stars and comments from them about the upcoming year. Jerry Lawler, for one, urged his fans to get ready for a major announcement from "The King." Could it have been that he was planning to surprise everyone and join the WWF?

Justice Is Served: Jake Roberts thought he made a shrewd (albeit sickening) move when he crashed the wedding reception of Randy Savage and Elizabeth and unleashed several of his snakes, even sticking one in the face of a petrified Liz. Savage, of course, wanted revenge. One problem: He had recently lost a retirement match. Since he couldn't beat some sense into "The Snake" in the ring, Sid Justice (Vicious) had to handle the job. It took him but one night to hand Roberts a lopsided loss—and quite a beating.

Hot Stuff From "Hot Stuff": Interviewing Eddie Gilbert was always an interesting assignment for a wrestling reporter, as the man tended to offer up plenty of candid and controversial thoughts. In this "Press Conference," the reigning Global Wrestling Federation TV champ talked about why he just couldn't remain a fan favorite for long, his hatred of Jerry Lawler, and his plans to dominate both the GWF and USWA, among other subjects.

Gift That Keeps On Giving: Sting wished he could have returned the "gifts" he was receiving from a mysterious enemy a decade ago, and who could blame him! They were vicious beatings from the sneak-attacking Cactus Jack and Abdullah the Butcher. But since he couldn't return these "gifts," he did the next best thing: He sent "gifts" back in the form of beatings from him and his new tag team partner, Rick Steiner. Cactus and Abby must have regretted starting such a feud.



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between falls

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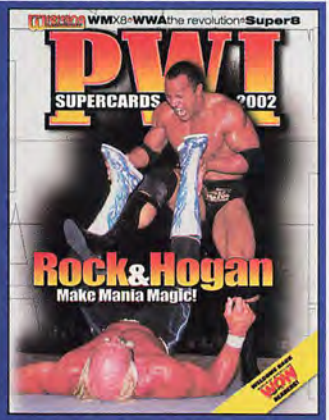
SUPER RESPONSE TO SUPERCARDS



After a few weeks of deliberating whether there should be a "Supercards" issue (August 2002) at all, we decided that WrestleMania X8, the ECWA Super 8, and WWA: The Revolution made the 2002 spring season as exciting as any other. Fortunately, most readers agreed.

"I have purchased every 'Supercards' edition you've ever produced," wrote Rob Coffey of South Gate, California. "This year's issue was truly special. Your featured coverage along with the full-color photos really made it a treat."

Were the Super 8 and Revolution worthy of "supercard" status? "I guess The Revolution was historic because it was the WWA's first effort in the U.S., but I don't know whether it can produce quality pay-per-views to include every year," wrote Patricia Gallagher of Norcross, Georgia. "The Super 8 is different because it's the best indy show of the year."

Frank Rosenberg of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, didn't think coverage of the WWA or Super 8 was such a comedown. "Didn't *PWI* cover the AWA's WrestleRock and all of those dreadful Uncensored pay-per-views in the 'Supercards' issue? I considered this year's 'Supercards' an improvement."

VAN DAM BANDWAGON

I hope the WWE powers-that-be are reading this letter. WWE has a reputation for destroying the larger-than-life images of former ECW and WCW headliners. RVD was the only bright spot in the Alliance storyline, and WWE has yet to match that push in recent months. I can't believe he lost to Eddie Guerrero on two consecutive pay-per-views before regaining the Intercontinental title.

I even saw Van Dam wrestle Justin Credible on *Sunday Night Heat!* Justin can't lick the sweat off RVD's boots! Vince, please let RVD spread his wings against real wrestlers like Triple-H, Steve Austin, Hulk Hogan, and The Undertaker.

KEVIN PEREIRA
Bronx, NY

Rob Van Dam could probably have a nice little feud with Buh Buh Ray Dudley, but reader Kevin Pereira believes he should be spending a lot more time wrestling guys on the level of Triple-H, Steve Austin, and Hulk Hogan.

PRETTY PREDICTABLE

Leave it to WWE to botch what could have been a spectacular ending to *Raw*. I was so bored with the May 20 broadcast that I paid attention only when Jerry Lawler wrestled (he's still one of the greats) and during the Undertaker-RVD World title match. When RVD appeared to have won, I actually jumped out of my chair and let out a cheer! I was suddenly excited about *Raw* again.

Then Ric Flair came out and I knew it was going to be another lame screw-job ending. Sure enough, 'Taker walked away with the belt. WWE genuinely surprised me for the first time in months, only to sink back into mediocrity.

Did WWE rehire Vince Russo and not tell anybody? Was Dusty Rhodes booking that night? Was "Cowboy" Bill Watts in the building? Will David Arquette be in next week's main event? Anything is possible in WWE.

DAVID MILLER
Oaktown, IN

IN SUPPORT OF ANGLE

I want to respond to Damian Carlin's letter in the August 2002 issue ("So *Un*-Inspiring") in which he claimed Kurt Angle did not deserve the 2001 Inspirational Wrestler of the Year Award. Mr. Carlin should realize Angle's performance transcended mere storylines last year. In light of the September 11 attacks, we needed someone like Angle to personify the spirit of America. With The Rock and Triple-H gone, he was the only one left to lead the WWF against the Alliance.

I disagree with the notion that Rock should have been voted Inspirational Wrestler of the Year. After all, he needed Angle's help to beat the Alliance at Survivor Series. I do agree with one of Mr. Carlin's opinions: Triple-H will be the 2002 Inspirational Wrestler of the Year.

ROBERT SCHUSCHU
schubag28@hotmail.com

GOING SOFT?

Can WWE please stop the insanity occurring in the hardcore division? It pulled off a major breakthrough with the inception of the hardcore title, and the appointment of Mankind as the first champion, but the division has become a mockery as of late.

To WWE's credit, there have been worthy champions, such as Mankind, Steve Blackman, Hardcore Holly, and Al Snow. But the 24/7 rule has to go. Fans see far more than they should backstage without hardcore title changes occurring every few seconds in the corridors. Please don't insult my intelligence, and get the action back inside the ring.

Hardcore wrestling should be akin to how gladiators fought to the death centuries ago. I love hardcore wrestling, so here is my plea to WWE:

Take stars such as Tommy Dreamer, Justin Credible, Tazz, and Raven out of the dark matches and from behind the announcers' desks. Hand them kendo sticks. Sign The Sandman, New Jack, Sabu, and, hell, even The Insane Clown Posse. Once the new and improved hardcore division is complete, go buy an FMW video. Watch and learn. No company promoted hardcore wrestling better.

Just put the hard back in the core.

ROBERT MAYO
Windham, ME

SMACKDOWN IN THAILAND?

We need more wrestling in Thailand! Here, we don't even receive *Smackdown*. *Raw* is the only wrestling program that airs weekly. Recently I traveled to Singapore to attend a WWE event held in Southeast Asia. I wish WWE would tour here more often!

Why doesn't the WWA, which is based in nearby Australia, tour Asia? The WWA would certainly save a lot in traveling costs compared to what that promotion must spend on its European tours. Considering the success of WWE's Asian *Smackdown* tour, the WWA should realize there is a huge number of wrestling fans on this continent, too.

ATTE OKSANEN
Bangkok, Thailand

☎ PROMOTE PROTOTYPE

As a real big fan of Ohio Valley Wrestling, I hope the current heavyweight champion, Prototype, is promoted to WWE soon. Prototype belongs in the most recent callup crop that includes Brock Lesnar, Deacon Bautista, and Randy Orton. Remember, Orton lost his last Ohio Valley match to Prototype just before he went to WWE.

If Vince McMahon wants to find someone to humble Orton, Prototype is the man.

SUSIE SWANSON
Quincy, MA

NOT ENOUGH BUFF STUFF

I love your magazines, but what do you guys have against Buff Bagwell? Big deal if he's controversial! I've met him several times, and he's always been nice to me. I know you have enough pics for "Through The Years." You featured Tammy Sytch, and what has she done lately?

Has *PWI* been too hard on Buff Bagwell? We don't think so, but reader Becky Coyle would like us to do more on him and to give him a bit more credit.

Better yet, how about "For The Ladies" featuring Buff? He has to be better than Kane, for goodness sake. When he returns to WWE, he'll embarrass you Buff-bashers at *PWI!* So, c'mon, more Buff!

BECKY COYLE
Darktolight1@yahoo.com

GET WELL SOON

I'd like to discuss two of wrestling's greatest stars of the recent past: "Superstar" Billy Graham and Bobby Heenan. Graham set the standard for guys such as Hulk Hogan and Jesse Ventura. He was the first muscleman to make an impact on the sport, a great former WWWF champion and a great showman to say the very least. He made wrestling colorful and exciting to watch in the 1970s.

Heenan is the greatest manager of all-time, bar none. He led Nick Bockwinkel, The Blackjacks, the Valiant brothers, and Curt Hennig to major titles. For a while, he even managed the best wrestler ever, Ric Flair. His quick wit and ability to incite a crowd were something special.

I'm really sorry to hear these two men are suffering from life-threatening illnesses (Graham from hepatitis, Heenan from throat cancer). There will never be another Superstar Graham or Bobby Heenan, and I hope they can overcome their ailments.

TONY McLAUGHLIN
Lafayette, IN □

PWI Hotline Extra!

Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: Can Shawn Michaels make a significant comeback in WWE? (June 4 to June 10, 2002)

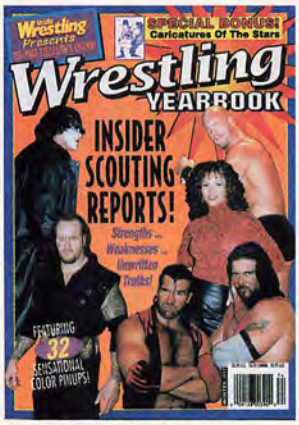
Hotline callers respond: "I was ready for a big letdown when Kevin Nash said he had a special announcement," said Jack Karakak of Quebec City, Quebec. "But even if Shawn Michaels doesn't wrestle, his promos should add some sizzle to the NWO."

"If Michaels doesn't plan on wrestling, this is a waste of time," said Doug Banks of Washington, D.C. "I can see it now: Michaels and Nash will take turns yakking on the microphone while X-Pac, The Big Show, and Booker T do all the work."

"I think Shawn used to claim he was equal to Hulk Hogan and Bret Hart," said Joselle Sampras of Modesto, California. "Nash played backup for Hogan and Hart in the original NWO and NWO 2000. Now Shawn is Nash's backup. He's no more than a pretty X-Pac."

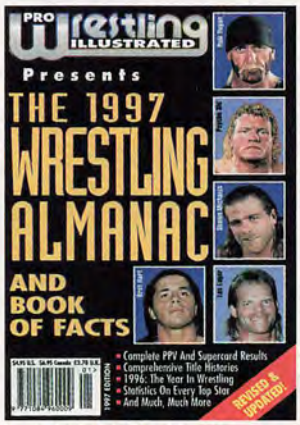
WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING?


SPECIAL BONUS! Caricatures Of The Stars
Wrestling YEARBOOK
INSIDER SCOUTING REPORTS!
Strengths ... Weaknesses ... Unwritten Traits!
FEATURING 32 SENSATIONAL COLOR PINUPS!

1997 WRESTLING YEARBOOK

Our caricaturist, Jason Conlan, has some fun with the sport's biggest stars. 30 full-page drawings accompany 30 scouting reports. 32 color pinups!



1997 WRESTLING ALMANAC

The authoritative wrestling reference tool. Complete PPV and supercard results. Title histories. 1996 in history. Stats. Digest-sized. 196 pages!

PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL
Roddy Piper
Vince McMahon
Terry Funk
Eddie Gilbert
Dallas Page
And More!!!
Ric Flair: 1982 "It's a do or die situation each time I step into the ring"
Sting: 1995 "I have been loyal to Hogan since he arrived in WCW; that's not going to change"
The Most Memorable "PWI Press Conferences" Of All-Time
Scott Hall: 1996 "Humility is fine. Charity is fine. Virtue is fine. But in the ring I'm all business."
BONUS! 32 FULL-PAGE COLOR PINUPS!

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One select "Press Conference" since 1979, *PWI's* first year. Scott Hall, Bruno Sammartino, Dallas Page, Kevin Von Erich, Ric Flair, and more! 32 color pinups!

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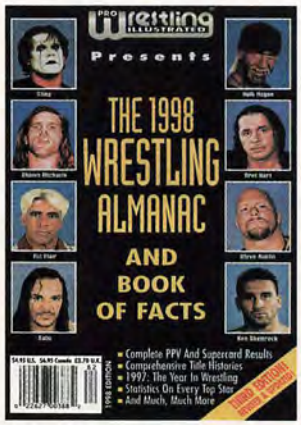
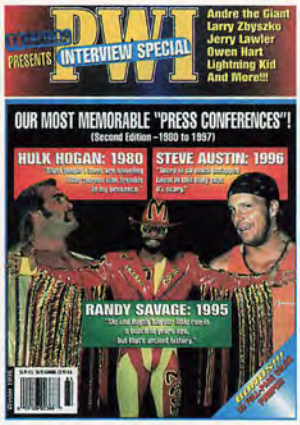
Butt-kickin', attitude-laced profiles, plus a look at what the future holds for wrestling's top superstars. 32 color pinups!



1998 WRESTLING ALMANAC

Our third edition, including updates on every section, plus a comprehensive look back on 1997. Digest-sized, 196 pages.

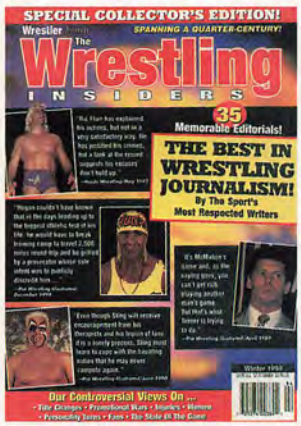


PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL (Vol. II)

One "Press Conference" for each year since 1980, including Hogan, Andre, Cactus, Austin, Sting, and more! 32 color pinups!

1999 WRESTLING ANNUAL

More cutting-edge profiles of the stars, including a glimpse into their futures. 32 color pinups!



WRESTLING INSIDERS (Winter '99)

Go back through the years with wrestling's most respected columnists, including Dan Shocket, Eddie Ellner, and Stu Saks.

WRESTLING SUPERCARDS

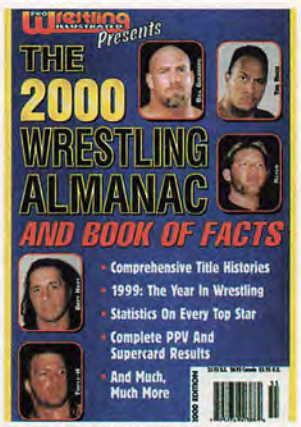
A historical look at WrestleMania! Ranking all 150 matches, 88 competitors, and the first 14 WrestleMania cards. 32 color pages.

PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL (Vol. III)

One "Press Conference" for each year since 1980, including Michaels, Sting, Flair, Ventura, Kimberly, Blassie, Luger, and more! 32 color pinups!

1999 WRESTLING YEARBOOK

We turn loose caricaturist Jason Conlan one more time (whether his subjects like it or not!). 30 scouting reports. 32 color pinups!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AND BOOK OF FACTS
Comprehensive Title Histories
1999: The Year In Wrestling
Statistics On Every Top Star
Complete PPV And Supercard Results
And Much, Much More
2000 EDITION

2000 WRESTLING ALMANAC

Our fifth edition includes a history of multi-federation champs, plus updates of our regular Almanac contents. Expanded to 228 pages!

We have limited remaining supplies on some of the most popular issues London Publishing has ever produced! Order now—before they're all gone!

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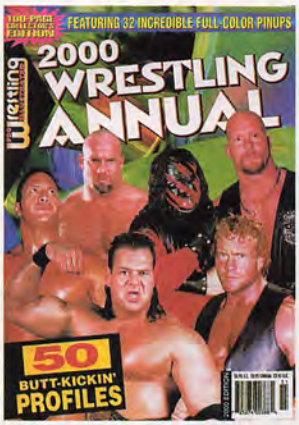
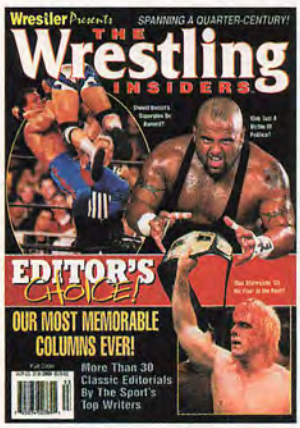
Relive a generation of wrestling through the eyes of London Publishing's highly respected columists, our second edition in the series.



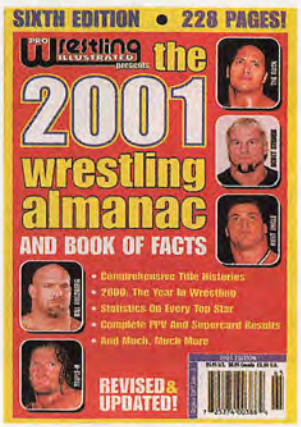
2000 WRESTLING ANNUAL
Our editors sharpen their pens and write up the wrestlers who will make a difference in the sport in Y2k. 32 color pinups!

BEST OF THE 20th CENTURY
The 100 greatest wrestlers of the century, as only London Publishing, with our vast archives can present. Special bonus color section: The best of the 1990s.

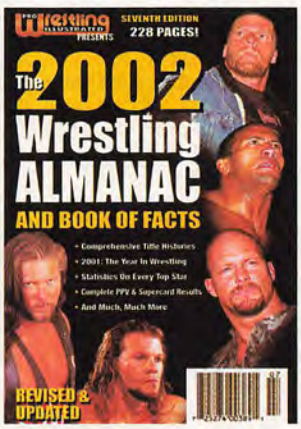
PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL (Vol. IV)
One "Press Conference" for each year since 1981, including Flair, Austin & Pillman, J.R., Scott Steiner, and Bret Hart. 32 color pinups!



WRESTLING INSIDERS (Fall 2000)
Titles, holds and maneuvers, supercards, tag teams, hall of famers, the state of the game. You want our opinion? Buy the magazine!



2001 WRESTLING ALMANAC
Completely revised and updated, this sixth annual edition contains more facts, figures, and information than ever before. 228 pages!



2002 WRESTLING ALMANAC
The seventh annual edition updates our historical records and takes a look back at the year 2001.

- ☐ 1997 Yearbook
- ☐ 1997 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ PWI Interview Special (Vol. I)
- ☐ 1998 Wrestling Annual
- ☐ 1998 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ PWI Interview Special (Vol. II)
- ☐ 1999 Wrestling Annual
- ☐ 1999 Wrestling Insiders (Winter '99)
- ☐ Wrestling Supercards
- ☐ PWI Interview Special (Vol. III)
- ☐ 1999 Wrestling Yearbook
- ☐ 2000 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ 2000 Wrestling Annual
- ☐ PWI Interview Special (Vol. IV)
- ☐ Wrestling Insiders (Fall 2000)
- ☐ 2001 Wrestling Almanac
- ☐ 2002 Wrestling Almanac

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5933/05-02

PWI official ratings

For period ended June 21, 2002

TOP 10

1 THE UNDERTAKER
304, Dallas, TX
(4) WWE World champion

2 TRIPLE-H
253, Greenwich, CT
(3) No. 1 contender: WWE World title

3 YUJI NAGATA
228, Tokyo, Japan
(2) IWGP heavyweight champion

4 ROB VAN DAM
237, Battle Creek, MI
(-) WWE Intercontinental champion

5 GENICHIRO TENRYU
235, Tokyo, Japan
(5) All-Japan Triple Crown champion

6 BROCK LESNAR
295, Minneapolis, MN
(-) No. 3 contender: WWE World title

7 HULK HOGAN
275, Venice Beach, CA
(1) No. 4 contender: WWE World title

8 KEN SHAMROCK
249, San Bernardino, CA
(-) NWA heavyweight champion

9 BOOKER T
250, Houston, TX
(-) No. 5 contender: WWE World title

10 YOSHINARI OGAWA
202, Fichigi, Japan
(-) GHC heavyweight champion

Booker T

TAG TEAMS

1 BILLY GUNN & CHUCK PALUMBO
Combined weight: 524 pounds
(1) WWE World tag team champions

2 MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN
Combined weight: 505 pounds
(6) IWGP International tag team champions

3 TAKESHI MORISHIMA & TAKESHI RIKIOH
Combined weight: 567 pounds
(2) GHC tag team champions

4 JEFF & MATT HARDY
Combined weight: 422 pounds
(5) No. 1 team: WWE Raw

5 ROB CONWAY & NICK DINSMORE
Combined weight: 466 pounds
(-) OVW Southern tag team champions

6 BILLY KIDMAN & RIKISHI
Combined weight: 519 pounds
(-) No. 2 team: WWE Smackdown

7 TAIYO KEA & KEIJI MUTO
Combined weight: 480 pounds
(4) All-Japan International tag team champions

8 REV. D-VON & DEACON BAUTISTA
Combined weight: 585 pounds
(-) No. 3 team: WWE Smackdown

9 CODY HAWK & TONY B
Combined weight: 452 pounds
(-) HWA tag team champions

10 THE SHANE TWINS
Combined weight: 610 pounds
(10) NWA tag team champions

WWE RAW

World Champion:
THE UNDERTAKER
(1) 304, Dallas, TX

1—ROB VAN DAM
(4) 237, Battle Creek, MI
2—BROCK LESNAR
(7) 295, Minneapolis, MN
3—BOOKER T
(8) 250, Houston, TX
4—EDDIE GUERRERO
(2) 223, El Paso, TX
5—WILLIAM REGAL
(5) 257, Blackpool, England
6—BRADSHAW
(9) 309, Roscoe, TX
7—X-PAC
(-) 221, Minneapolis, MN
8—RIC FLAIR
(-) 243, Charlotte, NC
9—THE BIG SHOW
(6) 485, Aiken, SC
10—TOMMY DREAMER
(-) 265, Yonkers, NY

WWE SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
THE UNDERTAKER
(-) 304, Dallas, TX

1—TRIPLE-H
(1) 253, Greenwich, CT
2—HULK HOGAN
(C) 275, Venice Beach, CA
3—CHRIS JERICHO
(3) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
4—EDGE
(5) 240, Toronto, Ontario
5—KURT ANGLE
(4) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
6—THE HURRICANE
(-) 210, Raleigh, NC
7—TEST
(8) 282, Toronto, Ontario
8—TAJIRI
(2) 213, Tokyo, Japan
9—HARDCORE HOLLY
(-) 249, Mobile, AL
10—FAAROOQ
(-) 291, Perry, GA

OVW

OVW Champion:
NOVA
(-) 214, Bricktown, NJ

1—PROTOTYPE
(C) 260, Los Angeles, CA
2—SEAN O'HAIRE
(5) 270, Hilton Head, SC
3—NICK DINSMORE
(6) 226, Jefferson, IN
4—DOUG BASHAM
(-) 241, Louisville, KY
5—DAMAJA
(-) 240, Seymour, IN
6—ROB CONWAY
(8) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
7—DAVID FLAIR
(4) 205, Charlotte, NC
8—SHELTON BENJAMIN
(7) 245, Minneapolis, MN
9—FLASH
(2) 225, Detroit, MI
10—SEVEN
(-) 278, Memphis, TN

HWA

HWA Champion:
RACE STEELE
(C) 255, Albuquerque, NM

1—JOHNNY THE BULL
(1) 236, Atlanta, GA
2—E.Z. MONEY
(2) 239, Atlantic City, NJ
3—SHANNON MOORE
(5) 181, Cameron, NC
4—LANCE CADE
(4) 253, San Antonio, TX
5—CHAD COLLYER
(8) 208, Liberty, IN
6—KIMO
(6) 400, Samoa
7—STEVE BRADLEY
(3) 239, Raymond, NH
8—MATT STRYKER
(9) 205, Cincinnati, OH
9—CODY HAWK
(10) 215, Malibu, CA
10—CHET JABLONSKI
(-) 230, Buffalo, NY

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

ALL PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Robert Thompson; **1**—American Dragon; **2**—Samoa Joe; **3**—Jardi Frantz; **4**—Larry Blackwell; **5**—Spanky; **6**—Kafu; **7**—James Watkins; **8**—Chad Collyer; **9**—Bobby Quance; **10**—Rising Son.

BORDER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—Johnny Swinger; **1**—Jerry Lynn; **2**—Scott D'Amore; **3**—Simon Diamond; **4**—King Kong Bundy; **5**—Sabu; **6**—El Tornado; **7**—Chris Sabin; **8**—Gutter; **9**—Larry Destiny; **10**—Mike Legacy.

CHIKARA: Champion—Title Vacant; **1**—Reckless Youth; **2**—La Parka; **3**—Mike Quackenbush; **4**—Blind Rage; **5**—Mister ZERO; **6**—Don Montoya; **7**—Hallowicked; **8**—UltraMantis; **9**—Ichabod Slayne; **10**—Zane Madrox.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Prince Nana; **1**—Mr. Ooh La La; **2**—Cheetah Master; **3**—Low-Ki; **4**—Xavier; **5**—Red; **6**—Billy Bax; **7**—Mike Kruel; **8**—Striker; **9**—Bobby Rude; **10**—Mozart Fontaine.

FUTURE OF WRESTLING: Champion—Norman Smiley; **1**—Bruno Sassi; **2**—Hack Myers; **3**—Chris Charger; **4**—Billy Fives; **5**—Kevin Sullivan; **6**—Dow Jones; **7**—Scoot Andrews; **8**—Mike Graham; **9**—Low-Ki; **10**—Christopher Daniels.

IPW HARDCORE WRESTLING: Champion—Agent Steele; **1**—Dr. Heresy; **2**—Mike Sullivan; **3**—Billy Fives; **4**—Scoot Andrews; **5**—Pat McGroin; **6**—Kubiak; **7**—Lex Lovett; **8**—Axis; **9**—Mike Shane; **10**—O.D.D.

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—The Bruiser; **1**—Shane Douglas; **2**—Romeo Valentino; **3**—Julio Dinero; **4**—Danny Doring; **5**—Doug Delicious; **6**—Adam Flash; **7**—Red; **8**—Orlando Jordan; **9**—Ronnie Zukko; **10**—Genesis.

NEW AGE WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Khan; **1**—Chip Riggs; **2**—Chance Romance; **3**—Joey Corman; **4**—Samir; **5**—Gemeni; **6**—Drunk Adam; **7**—D-Money Mueller; **8**—Pendragon; **9**—The Canadian Stallion; **10**—Big John Murder.

NWA WISCONSIN: Champion—Adrian Lynch; **1**—Travis Lee; **2**—The Natural; **3**—Mike Mercury; **4**—Mace; **5**—Tejas; **6**—Adrian Serrano; **7**—Rob Norwood; **8**—Romeo Valentino; **9**—Jason Dukes; **10**—Nomadic Warrior.

SOUTH TEXAS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Shadow; **1**—Black Gordman Jr.; **2**—Jeromy Sage; **3**—Bull Ramos; **4**—Jacob Ladder; **5**—Ruffy; **6**—Steve DeMarco; **7**—Mike Foxx; **8**—Rob Summers; **9**—Psycho Simpson; **10**—Devastator.

TRANS WORLD WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Skeeter McCoy; **1**—King Kong Bundy; **2**—Doink the Clown; **3**—Demolition Ax; **4**—Saboth; **5**—Gillberg; **6**—Rich Myers; **7**—Johnny Graham; **8**—J-Money; **9**—Rob Noxious; **10**—Johnny Greco.

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Sugaa; **1**—Samu; **2**—Wenzel; **3**—Low-Ki; **4**—Malachi; **5**—Poppa Pete; **6**—Big Dawg Molsonn; **7**—Samoan Storm; **8**—L.A. Smooth; **9**—Metal Maniac; **10**—Inferno.

NWA

NWA Champion:
KEN SHAMROCK
(-) 249, San Bernardino, CA

1—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(4) 287, Gifu, Japan
2—QUINN MAGNUM
(1) 265, Pittsburgh, PA
3—MALICE
(-) 308, Ocean Grove, NJ
4—DAN SEVERN
(C) 262, Coldwater, MI
5—HOTSTUFF HERNANDEZ
(2) 280, Houston, TX
6—SPYDER
(3) 225, New York, NY
7—A.J. STYLES
(-) 202, Gainesville, GA
8—DOUG GILBERT
(5) 248, Lexington, TN
9—J.P. BLACK
(6) 230, San Antonio, TX
10—JEFF JARRETT
(-) 230, Nashville, TN

WWA

WWA Champion:
SCOTT STEINER
(C) 275, Detroit, MI

1—NATHAN JONES
(1) 330, Queensland, Australia
2—JERRY LYNN
(4) 216, Minneapolis, MN
3—JEFF JARRETT
(2) 230, Nashville, TN
4—SABU
(5) 220, Bombay
5—A.J. STYLES
(3) 202, Gainesville, GA
6—ALAN FUNK
(7) 233, Alliance, OH
7—DEVON STORM
(6) 229, Pacific Palisades, CA
8—BUFF BAGWELL
(8) 240, Marietta, GA
9—BRIAN CHRISTOPHER
(9) 230, Memphis, TN
10—ERNEST MILLER
(10) 236, Atlanta, GA

JAPAN

1—YUJI NAGATA
(2) 228, Tokyo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
2—GENICHIRO TENRYU
(1) 235, Tokyo, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown
3—YOSHINARI OGAWA
(3) 202, Fichigi, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
4—KEIJI MUTO
(4) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
5—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(7) 287, Gifu, Japan
6—HIROYOSHI TENZAN
(-) 270, Tokyo, Japan
7—MITSUHARU MISAWA
(5) 228, Ashikaga, Japan
8—MASA CHONO
(-) 235, Tokyo, Japan
9—SATOSHI KOJIMA
(-) 223, Tokyo, Japan
10—MINORU TANAKA
(-) 219, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

1—HECTOR GARZA
(-) 220, Monterrey, Mexico
AAA heavyweight champion
2—UNIVERSO DOS MIL
(1) 240, Mexico City, Mexico
EMLL heavyweight champion
3—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(-) 173, Mexico City, Mexico
4—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(3) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
5—LATIN LOVER
(2) 190, Monterrey, Mexico
6—SHOCKER
(5) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico
7—MR. NIEBLA
(6) 185, Cualtitlan, Mexico
8—DR. WAGNER JR.
(4) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
9—BLACK TIGER
(9) 193, Mexico City, Mexico
10—APOLO DANTES
(-) 215, Guadalajara, Mexico

ratings analysis

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 22 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important–and respected–ratings system in the sport. This column is vital reading for all wrestling fans.

New arrivals. The first of the weekly NWA-TNA pay-per-views aired just a few days before this issue of *PWI* went to press, and it got mostly positive reviews. That's certainly good news, as the stronger the NWA-TNA shows are, the better the chances that NWA-TNA will succeed (obviously). And if NWA-TNA is a long-term success, that only helps the wrestling industry as a whole. **Vince McMahon** *needs* some sort of national competition, whether he's willing to admit it or not!

Ken Shamrock

NWA-TNA's debut show produced a new entrant into our Top 10, a man who hasn't made that list since his days in the WWF in the late-1990s. **Ken Shamrock** co-won the special "Gauntlet For The Gold" Royal Rumble-style battle royal, then defeated the other co-winner, **Malice** (formerly known as **The Wall**) in a match to capture the vacant NWA heavyweight championship. It was a very significant victory.

The NWA now has a chance to be catapulted back into the national spotlight. And Shamrock, a former WWF Intercontinental champion and former King of the Ring winner, gives both the NWA and NWA-TNA some much-needed credibility and star power. He gets the number-eight spot in this month's Top 10. He is expected to be challenged for the belt by the likes of Malice, **Jeff Jarrett**, and **Scott Hall** in the coming months. It should be an interesting summer for everyone involved with the NWA.

Making his first-*ever* appearance in our Top 10 is a man with the potential to make a much, much bigger impact on wrestling in the next few months, years, and beyond, **Brock Lesnar**. It became clear very soon after **Steve Austin** walked out of WWE on June 10 that the company would be relying very heavily on Lesnar to fill the huge void left by "Stone-Cold." Others will be expected to step up their games as well, but the time is now for Lesnar to live up to his nickname, "The Next Big Thing." As you've probably seen on the ratings pages by now, he makes his Top 10 debut at number six.

Don't be surprised if he's a lot closer to number one in the next few issues. It certainly wouldn't be out of the question for him to be WWE World champion by the end of the year. He has the look, he has the size, he has the background (former NCAA wrestling champion), and he has the superstar aura about him. The only thing Lesnar hasn't shown is whether he is a good talker. He'll eventually have to give that a shot. One would assume that **Paul Heyman** will only be able to serve as his mouthpiece for so long.

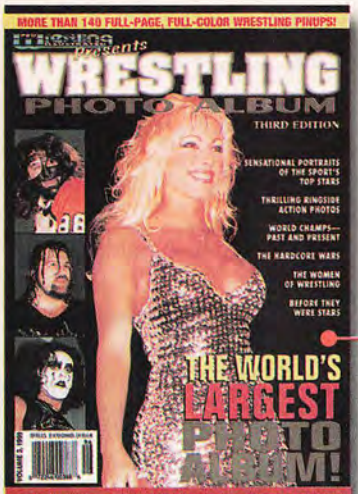
Here we go again ... Wasn't it just last month that we vented our frustration over the lack of quality tag team competition in WWE—yet again? Funny, but we noted in the "Ratings Analysis" column in the September 2002 issue that we didn't expect the team of **Rikishi** and **The Hurricane**—ranked number nine at the time—to stick together for very long. That wasn't exactly a bold prediction, and it turned out to be an accurate one.

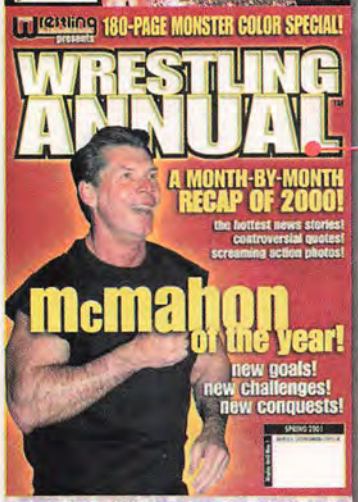
Billy Kidman

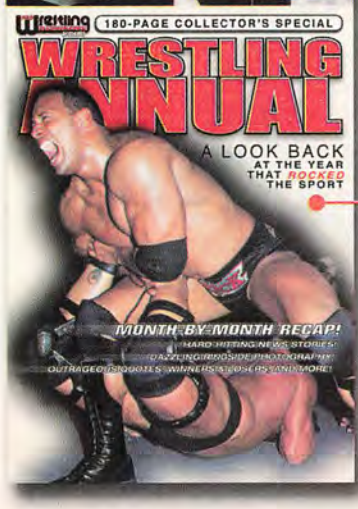
Since then, Rikishi has been paired with **Rico** (who wanted no part of that), won the WWE tag team title with Rico, lost the World tag title in part because of Rico, and started teaming with, of all people, **Billy Kidman**. When one of the tag teams in WWE is Rikishi and his partner of the month, you know the tag team roster is weak. In fact, unless you attended a WWE house show in June, you probably didn't know about the Rikishi/Kidman pairing. They challenged World tag champs **Billy Gunn** and **Chuck Palumbo** on a series of house shows, but they failed to come away with the gold.

Aside from Chuck and Billy, the only other WWE duos to make our tag team rankings this month are **The Hardy Boyz**, who as a *Raw*-only team can't challenge for the belts anyway, and **Rev. D-Von** and **Deacon Bautista**, who haven't shown any interest whatsoever in pursuing the tag belts so far. A weak roster, indeed! Perhaps **The Island Boys**, **Ekmo** and **Kimo**, who were likely to be promoted from the Heartland Wrestling Association sometime during the summer, can provide a spark for the division. Someone needs to do it!

That's all we have! As always, if you have any questions or comments regarding our ratings or what you see here, we want to hear from you. Write to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. □







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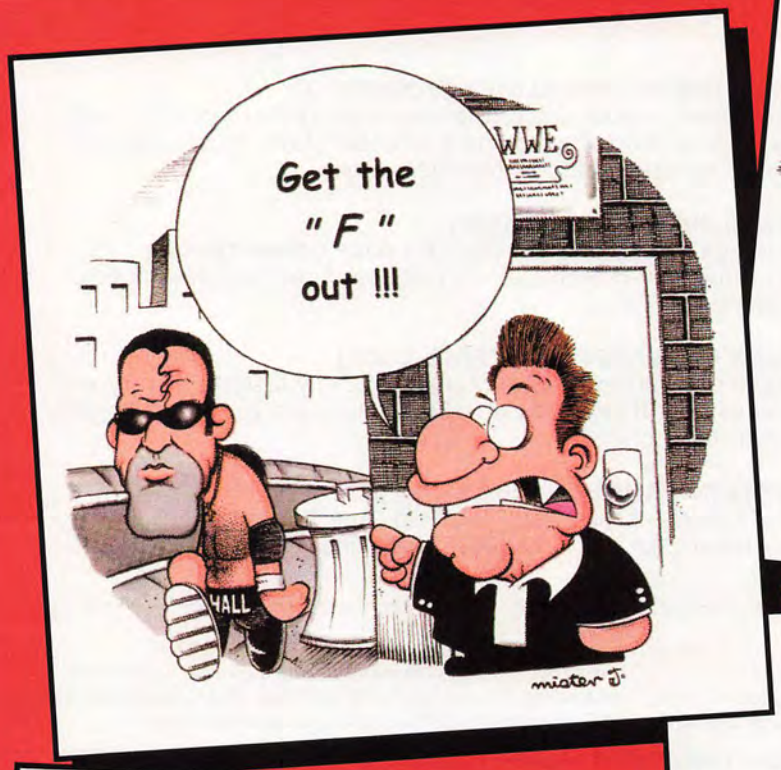
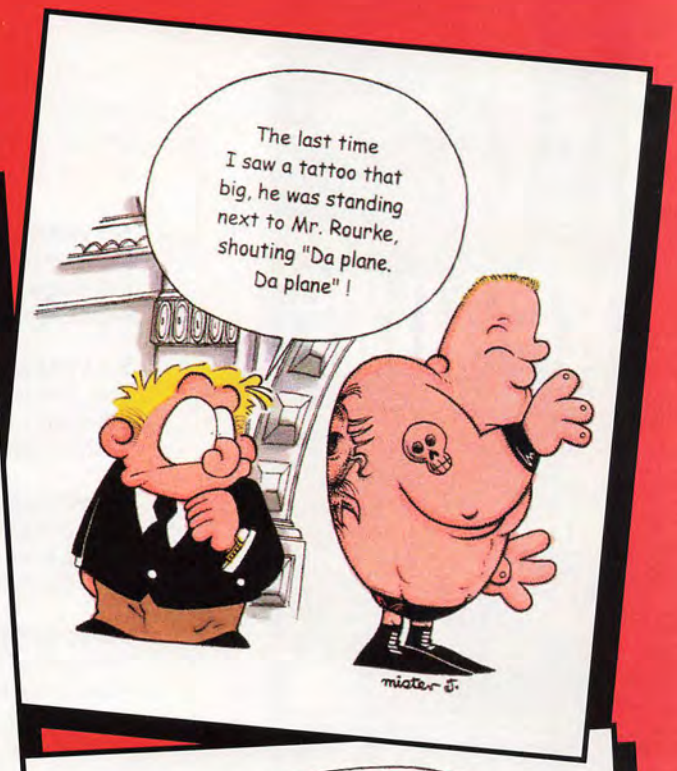
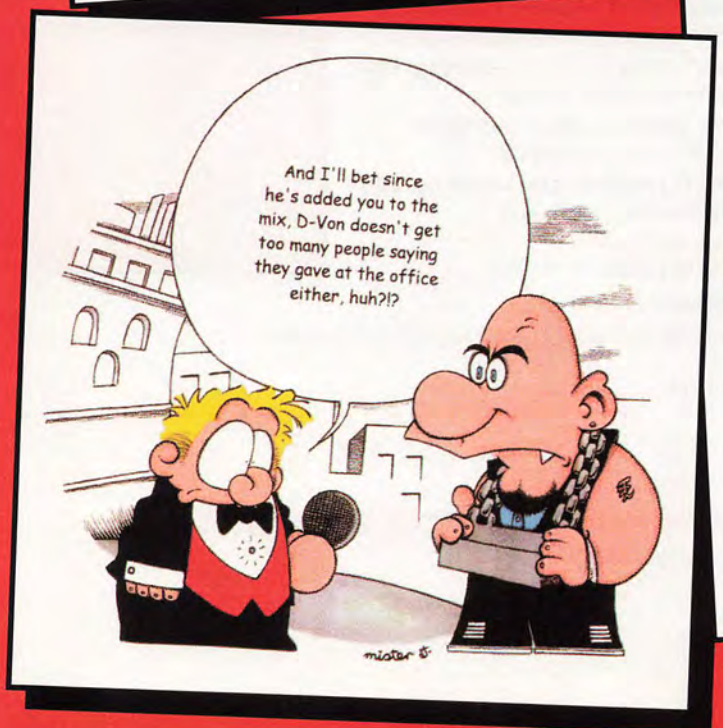
By Jason Conlan






And I'll bet since he's added you to the mix, D-Von doesn't get too many people saying they gave at the office either, huh?!?
mister J.

You know, after Wrestlemania last year, I thought you might be set for a bit of a comeback... after seeing Smackdown this week tho, I guess D-Von got your spot.
mister J.

THE Wrestling ANALYST

BACK ISSUES

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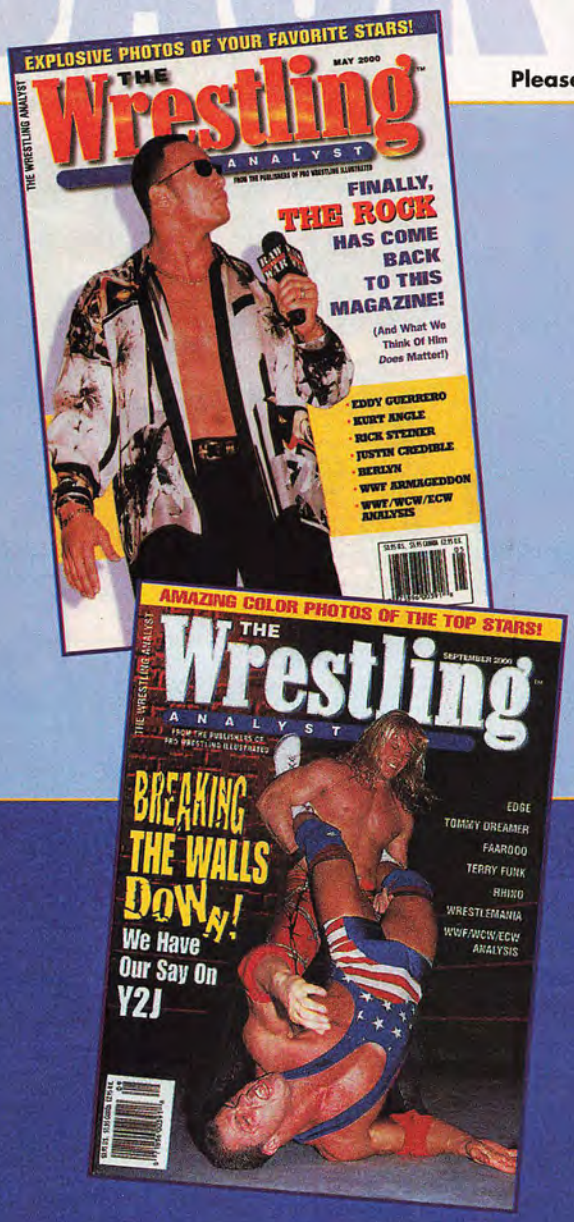

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- ☐ **July 2000:** Rikishi, Test, Madusa, Mike Awesome, Meng, Albert, Royal Rumble, WWF-WCW-ECW.
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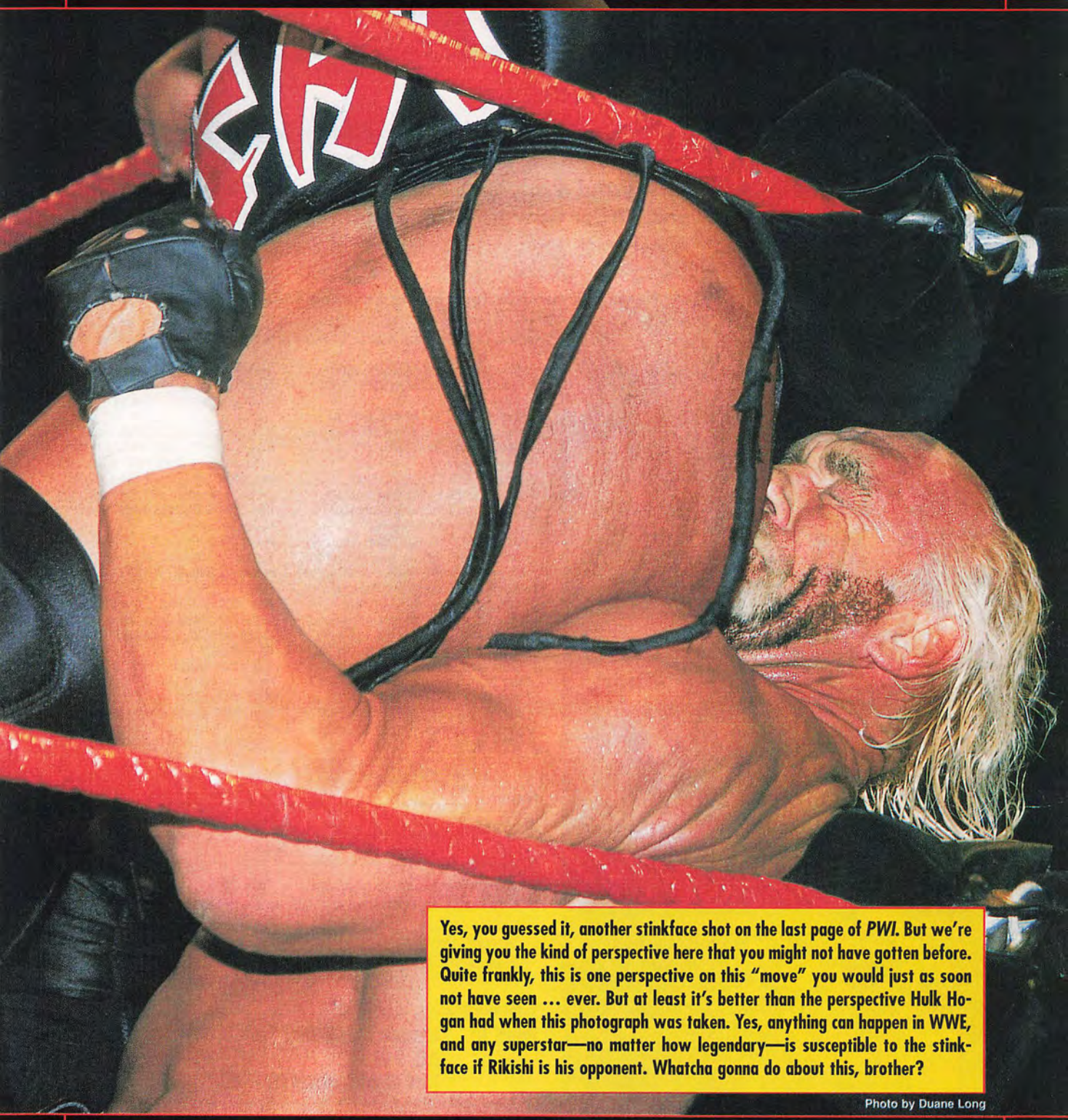

Yes, you guessed it, another stinkface shot on the last page of *PWI*. But we're giving you the kind of perspective here that you might not have gotten before. Quite frankly, this is one perspective on this "move" you would just as soon not have seen ... ever. But at least it's better than the perspective Hulk Hogan had when this photograph was taken. Yes, anything can happen in WWE, and any superstar—no matter how legendary—is susceptible to the stinkface if Rikishi is his opponent. Whatcha gonna do about this, brother?

Photo by Duane Long

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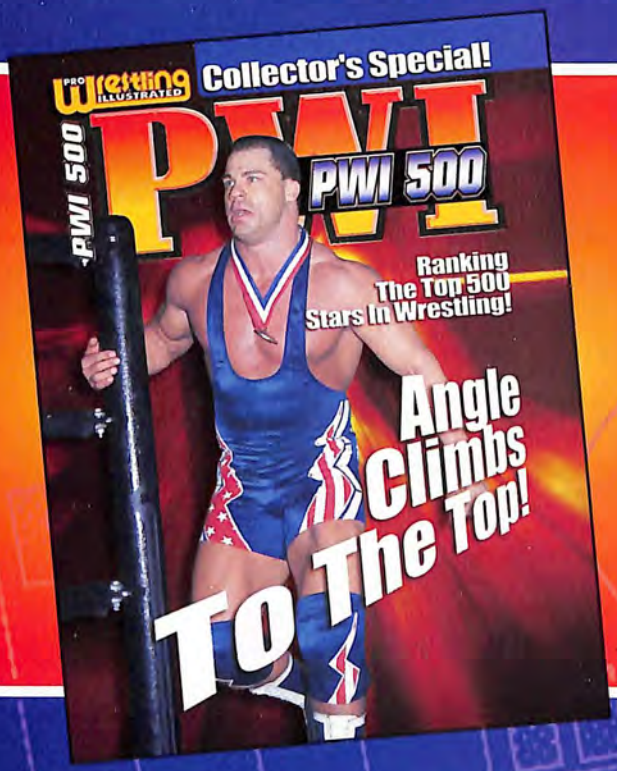

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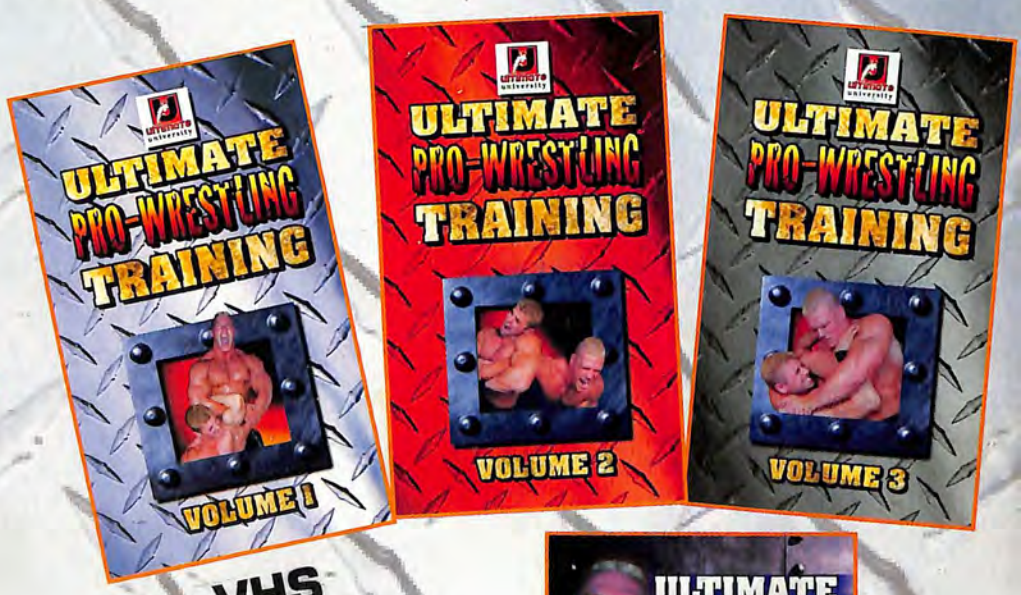

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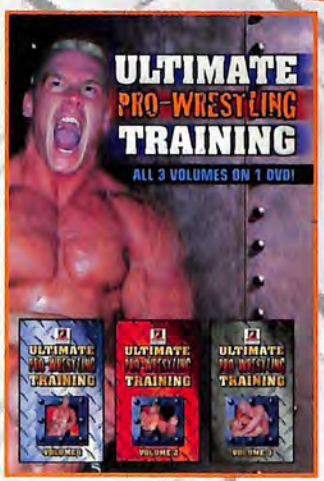

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